Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

Volume 25
Second Edition (2021)

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

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English translation
Second edition 1442/2021

Translated from the original Arabic titled: *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an* as published by Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Ṭābʿiah li-Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn fī al-Ḥawzah al-ʿIlmiyyah fī Qumm al-Muqaddasah, 1417 AH [vol. 13].

Published by Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume comprises of the exegesis of Chapter 17, namely, Surah Al-Isrāʾ.

The chapter relates to God's unity and His having no partner whatsoever, with the aspect of glorification outweighing that of praise. This is seen at the onset of the chapter: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant…* and is seen time and again later on: *Glory be to Him and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say* (17:43); *Say: Glory be to my Lord* (17:93); *And they say: Glory be to our Lord!* (17:108). Even the last verse of the chapter praises God while freeing Him from having a partner, guardian or son: *And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace; and proclaim His greatness magnifying (Him)* (17:111).

The chapter begins with its theme of glorifying God by alluding to the Prophet's ascension. It mentions his nocturnal journey from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque which is Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis). This is the temple that was built by David and Solomon, and which was sanctified by God for the Israelites.

Some cardinal verses (*ghurar al-āyāt*) in this chapter are: *Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent God; whichever you call upon, He has the best names* (17:110); *All do We aid – these as well as those – out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20); *And there is not a town but We will destroy it…* (17:58), and more.

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March 2021

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative

study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 17

Al-Isrāʾ (The Night Journey)

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Verse 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Sūrah al-Isrāʾ (The Night Journey) was revealed in Mecca and consists of 111 verses.

The chapter relates to God's unity and His having no partner whatsoever, with the aspect of glorification (*tasbīḥ*) outweighing that of praise (*taḥmīd*). This is seen at the onset of the chapter: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant…* and is seen time and again later on: *Glory be to Him and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say* (17:43); *Say: Glory be to my Lord* (17:93); *And they say: Glory be to our Lord!* (17:108). Even the last verse of the chapter praises God while freeing Him from having a partner, guardian or son: *And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace; and proclaim His greatness magnifying (Him)* (17:111).

The chapter is Meccan as the content of the verses show. *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* says that according to some exegetes, two of its verses are an exception to this: *And surely they had purposed to turn you away from…* (17:73); *And surely they purposed to unsettle you from the land…* (17:76).

Others have added two more verses to the exception: *And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men…* (17:60); *And say: My Lord! make me to enter a goodly entering…* (17:80).

According to al-Ḥasan, it is Meccan except for five of its verses: *And do not kill any one…* (17:33); *And go not nigh to adultery…* (17:32); *Those whom they call upon…* (17:57); *Keep up prayer…* (17:78); *And give to the near of kin…* (17:26).

On the authority of Muqātil, it is Meccan except for the following five

verses: *And surely they had purposed to turn you away…* (17:73); *And surely they purposed to unsettle you from the land…* (17:76); *And when We said to you:…* (17:60); *And say: My Lord! make me to enter…* (17:80); *…surely those who are given the knowledge before it…* (17:107).

According to Qatādah and al-Muʿaddil on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās: It is Meccan except for eight verses: *And surely they had purposed to turn you away… And say: My Lord! make me to enter a goodly entering…* (17:73-80).

However, the content and themes of the verses themselves bear no indication of the chapter being Medinite, and none of its laws relate to things that were exclusively revealed in Medina. Rather, similar laws were revealed in Meccan chapters such as Chapters 6 and 7 (al-Anʿām and al-Aʿrāf).

The chapter begins with its theme of glorifying God by alluding to the Prophet's ascension (*miʿrāj*). It mentions his nocturnal journey (*isrāʾ*) from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque which is Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis). This is the temple that was built by David and Solomon, and which was sanctified by God for the Israelites.

This is then linked to the rise, fall, honor and dishonor decreed by God for the Israelites. Whenever they obeyed, God raised them up, and whenever they disobeyed God put them down. He revealed the Book to them, commanded them to monotheism and prohibited them from polytheism.

He then turns the discourse to the state of this nation and the Book that has been sent to them, which is similar to the case of the Israelites; if the Muslims obey they will be rewarded, and if they disobey they will be punished. It is only a matter of one's actions, for every individual is treated according to what he does. Thus was the divine tradition with regard to past nations.

It then refers to many truths pertaining to knowledge of the origin, the resurrection, general religious laws including commands and prohibitions, and so on.

Some cardinal verses (*ghurar al-āyāt*) in this chapter are: *Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent God; whichever you call upon, He has the best names* (17:110); *All do We aid – these as well as those – out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20); *And there is not a town but We will destroy it…* (17:58), and more.

Commentary

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِی أَسْرَی بِعَبْدِهِ لَیْلاً مِنْ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَی الْمَسْجِدِ الأَقْصَی الَّذِی بَارَکْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِیَهُ مِنْ آیَاتِنَا إِنَّه هُوَ السَّمِیعُ الْبَصِیرُ ﴿١﴾

(17:1) ***Glory be to Him*** **(subḥān)** ***Who made His servant to go*** **(asrā)** ***on a night*** **(laylan)** ***from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.***

Subḥān is the verbal noun of *tasbīḥ*, which means to affirm the transcendence of something (*tanzīh*). It is used annexed to a noun (*muḍāfan*) as an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) that takes the place of a verb. The implied meaning of *subḥān Allāh* is: *subḥān Allāh is sabbaḥtu Allāha tasbīḥan*, meaning "I declare God's freedom from everything inappropriate to His Holiness." This phrase is often used as an exclamation. However the context of these verses only fits glorification, because that is the theme of the discourse, even though some exegetes have insisted that it is exclamatory.

Isrāʾ and *sary* mean travelling at night. *Sarā asrā* means that he travelled at night. *Sarā usriya bihi* means that he was taken on a journey at night. Another similar term is *sayr* (travel), which is used only for daytime and night time.

Laylan is a locative object. It means that this journey took place at night and that the round-trip took place in a single night before dawn broke.

…to the Farthest Mosque **(al-Masjid al-Aqṣā)** ***of which We have blessed the precincts…:*** To the Farthest Mosque means Jerusalem, as indicated by: *of which We have blessed the precincts*. *Qaṣā* means remoteness. It is called the Farthest Mosque (al-Masjid al-Aqṣā) because it was the Farthest Mosque from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, which was the position of the Prophet and the other addressees with him.

…so that We may show to him some of Our signs …: This explains the purpose of the night journey: to show him some of the divine signs—the particle *min* means "some of." The context of the verse indicates the greatness of these signs which God showed to the Prophet. This meaning is explicitly stated elsewhere in the Qur'an when discussing the story of

the night journey: *Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord* (53:18).

…surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing: This explains why He made him journey by night in order to shown him His signs: It was because He hears what His servants say and sees what they do. He heard what His servant said, and He saw that his inner state and condition (*ḥāl*) called for being distinguished [from others] with the honor of being taken on a nocturnal journey and seeing some of His greatest signs.

…Of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs: Here we see a grammatical shift for rhetorical purpose from the third person to the first person plural, which is then followed by a returns to the previous third person. The reason for this shift is to indicate that the night journey and what happened there—showing the signs to the Prophet—issued from the courtyard of grandeur and greatness, and the position of might and power. This was an act of God's greatest authority, where He manifested Himself (*tajallā*) to him through His greatest signs. If the verse had said, "To show him of His signs" or anything else, this subtle point would not have been made.[1]

The implied meaning is: One must thoroughly clear and glorify the One Who made His servant Muḥammad travel in the middle of a single night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem—the precincts of which He had blessed—to show him His greatest signs through His greatness and grandeur and by His far-reaching power and authority. He did this because He is the Hearing, the Seeing. He knew that his servant is worthy of being distinguished by this honor based on what He heard of his supplication and of what He saw of his inner condition.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:
Gabriel (Jabraʾīl), Michael (Mīkāʾīl) and Seraphiel (Isrāfīl) brought the *burāq*[2] to God's Messenger, one taking the rein, another the stirrups and the other spreading his clothing over it. There the *burāq* startled, so Gabriel slapped it and said to it, "Calm down, *burāq*, because no prophet like he has ever ridden you nor will ever ride you."

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1 This is because "Our" is a majestic plural or the royal "We." (Trans.)

2 This is a heavenly mount that carried the Prophet on his night journey. (Trans.)

It then flew him and lifted him up not too high, accompanied by Gabriel who showed him the signs of heaven and the earth.
He [the Prophet] said: While I was looking to the left, someone called out from my right: "O Muḥammad!" I did not answer him or turn toward him. Someone then called me from my left: "O Muḥammad!" but I did not answer him or turn toward him. A woman then faced me, her forearms exposed, upon which was all the world's finery. She said: "O Muḥammad, look at me so that I can speak to you," but I did not turn toward her. I travelled on and then I heard a voice that frightened me, but I kept going. Thereafter, Gabriel put me down and said: "Pray," so I prayed. He then asked: "Do you know where you prayed?" I replied: "No." He said, "You prayed on Mount Sinai where God spoke directly to Moses."
I mounted and we travelled as far as God willed, then he [Gabriel] said to me: "Dismount and pray," so I dismounted and prayed. He then asked me, "Do you know where you prayed?" I replied, "No." He said, "You have prayed in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is in the district of Jerusalem where Jesus son of Mary was born."
I then mounted and we travelled until we reached Jerusalem. There I tied up the *burāq* to the ring where the prophets used to tie their steeds. Gabriel was by my side. We then found Abraham, Moses and Jesus among a group of Prophets that only God knows their count. They gathered around me and the *iqāmah* was recited for prayer. I had no doubt that Gabriel would lead us but then when they straightened their lines Gabriel took my arms, led me ahead [of himself], and thus I led their congregation. There is no boast in that.
The treasurer then brought me three cups: there was milk in one, water in another, and wine in the third. I heard someone say: "If he takes water, he and his nation will drown. If he takes wine, he and his nation will go astray. If he takes milk, he and his nation will be guided." So I took the milk and drank from it. Thereafter, Gabriel said to me: "You have gone aright and your nation will go aright." He then asked me: "What did you see in your journey?" I replied: "Someone called to me from my right." He then asked me, "Did you answer him?" I said, "No, nor did I turn toward him." He said, "That was the Jewish proselytizer. If you had answered

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him, your nation would have turned Jewish after you." He then said, "What did you see [then]?" I replied, "Someone called to me from my left." He asked me, "Did you answer him?" I replied, "No, nor did I turn toward him." So he replied, "That was the Christian proselytizer. If you had answered him, your nation would have become Christian after you." He then asked, "What faced you?" I replied, "I met a woman, exposing her forearms which bore all of the world's finery. She said, 'O Muḥammad! Look at me so that I can talk to you.'" He asked, "Did you speak to her?" I replied, "I neither spoke to her nor turned toward her." He said, "That was the world (*dunyā*). If you had spoken to her, your nation would have chosen this world over the hereafter." I then heard a voice, which frightened me and so Gabriel, asked me, "Do you hear, Muḥammad?" I replied, "Yes." He said, "This is a rock that I cast from the edge of hell seventy years ago and now it reached the bottom."

It has been said that after this incident the Messenger of God did not laugh until he passed away.[1]

He [the Prophet] said: Gabriel ascended and I ascended with him to the lowest heaven, which is guarded by an angel called Ismāʿīl. He fends off the snatchers as mentioned in the verse: *Except him who snatches off but once, then there follows him a brightly shining flame* (37:10). There are seventy thousand angels under him and under every angel there are another seventy thousand angels. He [Ismāʿīl] asked, "O Gabriel! Who is this who is with you?" Gabriel replied: "It is Muḥammad, the Messenger of God." He asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "Yes." He then opened the door, I greeted him and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. He said: "Welcome to the righteous brother and prophet."

The angels kept coming to meet me until I entered the lowest heaven. They all received me while smiling with delight until I was received by an angel that was greater than anything that I had ever seen, with an unpleasant countenance, and visibly angry. He said the same prayer for me as the others angels, except that

1 This is an aside statement by Imam al-Ṣādiq—or one of the transmitters of the hadith—in his narration of the Prophet's night journey. (Trans.)

he did not smile and I did not see the delight of the other angels in him. I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel? Indeed I am terrified of him." He replied: "It makes sense to be terrified of him—we are all terrified of him—because this is Mālik, the custodian of hell. He has never laughed and has remained so ever since God put him in charge of hell. He gets angrier and more infuriated every day at God's enemies and the people of disobedience, for God takes revenge on them through him. If he were to smile at anyone ever, it would have been you." I then greeted him. He greeted me back and gave me glad tidings of heaven. Since God has described Gabriel's position as: *One (to be) obeyed, and faithful in trust* (81:21) I asked him [Gabriel]: "Will you not tell him to show me hell?" So Gabriel said to him: "O Mālik! Show Muḥammad hell." He uncovered it to me and opened one of its gates. A flame blazed out in the sky from it, flared up and rose until I thought that it is going to catch me. I said: "Gabriel! Tell him to cover it up again." He told him and he said to the fire: "Go back!" It then returned to its place from which it had come.

I then passed onwards and saw a large bodied swarthy man (*rajulan ādaman*).[1] I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He said: "This is your forefather Adam, where he is shown his offsprings and he says: Good spirit and good fragrance from a good body."

God's Messenger then recited Chapter 83 (Sūrah al-Muṭaffīn) from after verse 17: *Nay! Most surely the record of the righteous shall be in the Iliyin. And what will make you know what the highest Iliyin is? It is a written book, those who are drawn near (to Allah) shall witness it* (83:18-21) to the end of the chapter.

He [the Prophet] said: I greeted my forefather Adam and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. He said: "Greetings to the righteous son and the righteous prophet sent in the righteous time."

He said: I then passed by one of the angels sitting on a seat (*majlis*). The whole of the world was between his knees a tablet of light with some writing was in his hand. He was looking at the tablet with fixed eyes, without turning to the right or the left, and

1 The Arabic terms in brackets are what the author has discussed and defined after the tradition. (Trans.)

his face looked like an aggrieved person. I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He said: "This is the angel of death, who is relentless in capturing the souls." I said: "Gabriel, take me close to him so that I can speak to him." He took me close to him, I greeted him and Gabriel said to him: "This is Muḥammad, the Prophet of Mercy whom God has sent to His servants." He welcomed me, prayed for my longevity in peace, and said: "Rejoice, O Muḥammad, for indeed I see that all good is in your nation." I said: "Praise be to God, the Benefactor, Who has blessed His servants with bounties. This is of my Lord's blessing and mercy upon me." Gabriel then said: "He is the most hardworking angel." I asked him [the Angel of Death]: "Are you the one who has taken the life of everyone who has ever died or will ever die from now on?" He replied: "Yes." I asked: "Do you see them wherever they are and witness them by yourself?" He replied: "Yes." The angel of death then added: "God has placed the entire universe under my authority and power just like a dirham in the hand of a person, where he can flip it as he pleases. There is not a single home which I do not peruse five times every day. I say when the family of a deceased weeps over the deceased: Do not cry for him because I will keep visiting you over and over again until none of you shall remain." God's Messenger then said: "Death is enough of an overwhelming catastrophe (*ṭāmmah*), O Gabriel." Gabriel replied: "And what comes after death is a much greater catastrophe than death."

He [the Prophet] said: I then passed onwards, and lo, I reached a group of people in front of whom were tables spread with good meat and bad meat. They were eating from the bad meat and leaving the good meat untouched. I asked: "Who are these, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are those who eat what is unlawful instead of what is lawful. They are from your nation, O Muḥammad."

God's Messenger continued: I then saw an angel whom God had created in an astonishing fashion: half of his body was fire and the other half was ice. The fire did not melt the ice and the ice did not extinguish the fire. He was calling out in a loud voice, saying: "Praise be to Him Who has stopped the heat of this fire from melting the ice, and has stopped the cold of this ice from extinguishing the heat of this fire. O God, binder of fire to ice, bind together the hearts of your believing servants." I asked:

"Who is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is an angel whom God has put in charge of the sides (*aknāf*) of heaven[s] and the edges of the earths. He is the sincerest adviser of God's angels for His believing servants among the people of the earth. He has been praying for them as you heard since he was created."

I saw two angels calling out in heaven; one of them was saying: "O God, compensate anyone who gives charity"; and the other one was saying: "O God, bring loss to anyone who withholds [from donation]."

I then passed onwards, and lo, I reached a group of people who had lips like that of camels. Their flesh was being cut from their sides and cast into their mouths. I asked: "Who are these, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are those who slander and backbite others."

I then passed onwards, and lo, I reached a group of people smashing their heads with rocks. I asked: "Who are they, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are those who sleep without performing the Evening Prayer (*ṣalāt al-ʿishāʾ*)."

I then passed onwards, and lo, I reached a group of people where fire was being cast in their mouths and was exiting through their bottoms. I asked: "Who are they, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are those who eat what belongs to the orphans unjustly. *Surely they only swallow fire into their bellies and soon they shall enter burning fire* [4:10]."

I then passed onwards, and lo, I reached a group of people that wanted to stand up but could not because their stomachs were too big. I asked: "Who are they, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are: *Those who swallow down usury cannot arise except as one whom Satan has prostrated by (his) touch does rise* (2:275)." They were treated as Pharaoh's family, *exposed to the fire (every) morning and evening* [40:46], saying: Lord, when will the hour come?

I then passed onwards and lo, I was beside women hung by their breasts. I asked: "Who are these, Gabriel?" He replied: "They are those who pass on their husbands' inheritance to children who are not their husbands'."

The Messenger of God said:[1] "God's wrath is severe at a woman

1 Based on the Arabic text of the hadith, apparently this is an aside statement

who introduces an outsider to a family's lineage, that he may discover their flaws and weak spots and consume their treasures."
He then said: We passed by some of God's angels whom God had created as He pleased and had set their faces as He pleased. There was no spot on their bodies that was not praising and glorifying God from every side in various voices. Their voices rose in praise and weeping in awe of God. I asked Gabriel about them, and he replied: "They were created as you can see. Surely every angel out of them does not speak a word to his counterpart next to him, nor do they raise their heads to what is above them or lower [their heads] to what is beneath them out of fear of God and humility [toward Him]." I then greeted them and they signaled a greeting back to me by nodding their heads and without looking at me, out of humility [toward God]. Gabriel then said to them: "This is Muḥammad, the prophet of Mercy, sent by God to His servants as a messenger and prophet. He is the last of the prophets and their master. Are you not going to speak to him?" When they heard this from Gabriel, they faced me, greeted me with honor, and gave me glad tidings of goodness for me and my nation.
We then ascended to the second heaven, and lo, there were two men there who looked like each other. I asked: "Who are they, Gabriel?" He replied to me: "Maternal cousins John [the Baptist] and Jesus." I greeted them and they greeted me. I sought forgiveness for them and they sought forgiveness for me. They said: "Greetings to the righteous brother and prophet."
There [in the second heaven] I also saw angels who had [signs of] humility upon them. God had fashioned their faces as He pleased. There was no angel among them except that it was glorifying and praising God in different voices.
We then ascended to the third heaven, and lo, there was a man who exceeded the rest of creation in beauty, the way the full moon exceeds the rest of the stars [in brightness]. I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is your brother Joseph." I greeted him and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. He said: "Welcome to the righteous prophet

that the Prophet made when narrating his night journey, not something that he said during the journey. (Trans.)

and the righteous brother sent in the righteous time." There [in the third heaven] I also saw angels who had [signs of] humility upon them like the ones I described in the first and second heavens. Gabriel told them about me what he had said to the others and they did as the others had done.

We then ascended to the fourth heaven, and lo, there was a man there. I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is Enoch (Idrīs), whom God has raised to a high station." I greeted him and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. There [in the fourth heaven] I also saw angels who had [signs of] humility upon them like in the heavens I had passed through. They gave me glad tidings for me and for my nation. I then saw an angel sitting on a couch. He had seventy thousand angels under him, and there were another seventy thousand angels under each of them.

It occurred to God's Messenger that he was it.[1] Gabriel called out to him, saying: "Get up! And thus he will [remain] standing until the Day of Resurrection."

[The Prophet continued:] We then ascended to the fifth heaven, and lo, there was a middle-aged man with large eyes. I had not seen a middle-aged man greater than him. Around him was a group of his nation. Their multitude impressed me, so I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is the beloved of his people, Aaron son of Amram (ʿImrān)." I greeted him and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. I also saw angels there with [signs of] humility upon them as I had seen in the [other] heavens.

We then ascended to the sixth heaven, and lo, there was a tall, dark-complexioned man, as if he was from Shanuwwah[2] [an Arab tribe]. If he were to wear two shirts his hair would have passed through both. I heard him say: "The Israelites claim that I am the

1 The author has described what is meant by this after the hadith. This sentence again is a statement by Imam al-Ṣādiq. (Trans.)

2 Shanūʾah, also written as Shanuwwah, is the name of an Arab tribe. Some narrations say Shabwah, which is the name of another Arab tribe. Either way, the man is likened to the people of an Arab tribe for his color. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 18:332. See the author's comments after the hadith. (Trans.)

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dearest son of Adam to God, but this man is dearer to God than I." I asked: "Who is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is your brother Moses son of Amram (ʿImrān)." I greeted him and he greeted me. I sought forgiveness for him and he sought forgiveness for me. I also saw angels there with [signs of] humility upon them like in the [other] heavens.

We then ascended to the seventh heaven and I did not pass a single angel who did not say: "O Muḥammad! Cup and tell your nation to cup (*ḥijāmah*)." And lo, there was a grey haired and grey bearded man (*ashmaṭ*) sitting on a throne there. I asked: "Gabriel, who is this that is in the seventh heaven at the door of al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr (the Frequented House)[1] near to God?" He replied: "This, Muḥammad, is your forefather Abraham, and this is your place and the place of the Godwary in your nation."

God's Messenger then recited: *"Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrahim are those who followed him and this prophet and those who believe and Allah is the guardian of the believers* (3:68)."[2]

[The Prophet continued]: I greeted him and he greeted me and said: "Welcome to the righteous prophet and the righteous son, sent in the righteous time." I also saw angels there with [signs of] humility upon them like in the [other] heavens. They gave me glad tidings for me and for my nation.

God's Messenger said: I saw in the seventh heaven seas of shining bright light, with such glitter that could snatch away one's sight. There were [also] seas of darkness there and seas of snow that were thundering. Whenever I was appalled and saw something frightening I inquired Gabriel [about it] and he would tell me: "Rejoice, O Muḥammad! Give thanks for your Lord's blessing upon you, and thank God for what he Has made for you."

He [the Prophet] said: Thereafter, God made me firm with His strength and help. After speaking much with Gabriel and expressing my astonishment, Gabriel said: "O Muḥammad! Do you think

1 Al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr (the Frequented House, the Inhabited House) is not a terrestrial place of worship, but a heavenly one. See narration 9 under Discussion of the Narrations below. (Trans.)

2 Again, this is Imam al-Ṣādiq's narration. Perhaps the Prophet added this verse when he was recounting the story of his ascension afterwards. (Trans.)

what you see is great? This is but one creations of of your Lord's creations. What about the Creator Who has created what you see? And what you do not see of your Lord's creation is greater than this. There are seventy thousand veils between God and His creation. I and Seraphiel are the closest creatures to God. Between us and Him are four veils: a veil of light, a veil of darkness, a veil of cloud and a veil of water."

He [the Prophet] said: Among the wondrous things that God had created and was under His command I saw a rooster whose feet were on the [lowest] limits of the seventh earths and whose head was at the throne. He was one of God's angels whom God had created as He had willed, with its two feet positioned on the [lowest] limits of the seventh earths. He then started ascending into the air toward the seventh heaven, and continued to ascend to the point that his crown ended up near the throne. He says: "I glorify my Lord wherever I am. Your Lord is of such grand status that you do not know where He is." He has two wings on his shoulders. When he spreads them they go past the east and the west. At dawn time, he spreads his wings, flaps them and cries out the following praise: "Glory be to God, the King, the Holy. Glory be to God, the Great, the Transcendent. There is no god but God, the All-Living, the Upright." When he says this, all the roosters of the earth flap their wings and start glorifying God. When that rooster in heaven falls silent, all the roosters in earth fall silent. That rooster had green feathers (*zaghab*) under his white plumages. The whiteness of the plumage was the brightest white that I had ever seen, and the green of the underlying feathers was the most intense green that I had ever seen.

I then passed onwards with Gabriel and entered al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr, where I prayed two units (*rakʿah*) of prayer. With me were some of my companions wearing new clothes, and others wearing ragged clothes. Those wearing new clothes entered, and those wearing ragged clothes sat down [outside].

I then went out and found two rivers flowing before me, one called al-Kawthar (lit. "Abundance of Good") and another called al-Raḥmah (lit. "Mercy"). I drank from al-Kawthar and washed up from al-Raḥmah. They both opened up the way for me so I entered *al-jannah* (the Garden, Paradise). Its earth was like musk,

and lo, on its two sides were the houses of me and my household (*ahlī*). There I saw a servant-girl dipping in the Garden's rivers. I asked her: "To whom do you belong, O servant-girl?" She replied: "To Zayd b. Ḥārithah"—I gave him the glad tidings of her when I woke up in the morning.

Its birds were like Bactrian camels (*al-bakht*), and its pomegranates were like great buckets (*duliyy*). There was a tree there that if a bird were released at its base it could not go round it in seven hundred years. There is not a single home in the Garden which does not have one of its branches in it. I asked: "What is this, Gabriel?" He replied: "This is the Ṭūbā Tree."

God says: *Tuba shall be theirs and a goodly return* (13:29).[1]

God's Messenger said: When I entered the garden I thought with myself and asked Gabriel about the seas there, their terror and their wonders. He replied: "They are the canopies of veils with which God veils Himself. Were it not for those veils, the light of the Throne would burn everything in it."

I finally reached the farthest lote-tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*), and lo, there was a leaf on it which shaded one of the nations. I was as near to it as God says: *The measure of two bows or closer still* (53:9). He [God] then called out to me: *"The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord* [2:285]." So I said, responding on behalf of myself and my nation: *"and (so do) the believers; they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers; We make no difference between any of His messengers; and they say: We hear and obey, our Lord! Thy forgiveness (do we beseech), and to Thee is the eventual course* [2:285]." God then said: *"Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought* [2:286]." I said: *"Our Lord! take us not to task if we forget or make a mistake* [2:286]." So God said: I will not take you to task. I then said: *"Our Lord! do not lay on us a burden as You didst lay on those before us* [2:286]." So God said: "I will not overburden you." I said: *"Our Lord do not impose upon*

1 Again, this is apparently an addition by Imam al-Ṣādiq's, although it could also be either a continuation of Gabriel's answer or part of the Prophet's narration. (Trans.)

us that which we have not the strength to bear; and pardon us and grant us protection and have mercy on us, You are our Patron, so help us against the unbelieving people [2:286]." So God said: "I grant you that for you and your nation."

Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The Messenger of God asked these things for his nation while he was the noblest of God's visitors.

God's Messenger then said: "My Lord! You bestowed blessings upon Your prophets, so bestow upon me [as well]!" God replied: "Among what I shall give you are two statements from under My Throne: 'There is no movement and no power save in God (*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-Allāh*),' and 'There is no refuge from You except toward You (*lā manjā minka illā ilayka*).'

He [the Prophet] said: The angels taught me something to say every morning and evening: "O, God, my wrongdoing seeks refuge in Thy pardon; my sin seeks refuge in Thy forgiveness; my lowliness seeks refuge in Thy might; my destitution seeks refuge in Thy opulence; and my perishing face seeks refuge in Thy Eternal Face that never perishes." I also say this at evening time.[1]

I then heard the call to prayer (*adhān*). It was by an angel that had not been seen in heaven before that night. He said: "God is the greatest! God is the greatest (*Allāhu Akbar*)!" God then said: "My servant has spoken the truth. I am greater than everything." He then said: "I testify that there is no god but God! I testify that there is no god but God!" God said: "My servant has spoken the truth. I am God; there is no god but I; there is no god other than Me." He then said: "I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God! I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God!" God said: "My servant has spoken the truth, that Muḥammad is my servant and messenger; I have sent him and chosen him." He then said: "Hasten to prayer! Hasten to prayer!" God said: "My servant has spoken the truth. He has called to the obligation owed to Me. Whoever walks toward it with willingness and hope [for reward] will be forgiven of his past sins." He then said: "Hasten

1 Other narrations and scholars have specified that the Arabic expression in the evenings should say *amsā* instead of *aṣbaḥa* (lit. "My wrongdoing starts the night while seeking refuge…" vs. "…starts the day while…"). The two terms could not be translated eloquently. (Trans.)

to salvation! Hasten to salvation!" God said: "It [prayer] is goodness, success and salvation."

I led the angels in heaven [in prayer] as I had led the prophets in Jerusalem.

Then a fog (*ḍabābah*) overwhelmed me and so I prostrated myself. My Lord then called me: "I have made fifty prayers obligatory for every prophet before you and I have made them obligatory for you and your nation. You and your nation should maintain them."

God's Messenger said: Then I descended until I passed by Abraham and he did not ask me anything. I continued until I got to Moses. He asked me: "What did you do, Muḥammad?" I replied: "My Lord said: 'I have made fifty prayers obligatory for every prophet before you and I have made them obligatory for you and your nation.'" Moses said: "O Muḥammad! Your nation is the last and the weakest of nations. These prayers will not add anything to Your Lord, but verily your nation will not be able to perform them. Go back to your Lord and ask Him to reduce them for your nation."

So I went back to my Lord until I reached the Lote-tree of the Ultimate Boundary (*sidrat al-muntahā*). I prostrated myself and then said: "You have made fifty prayers obligatory for me and my nation. Neither I nor my nation can bear that, so reduce my load." So He discounted ten units from my load.

I went back to Moses and told him about it. He said: "Go back again, for indeed you cannot bear this." So I went back to my Lord and He reduced another ten prayers for me. Every time I went back I would prostrate myself. This continued until the obligatory prayers were reduced to ten. I then went back to Moses and told him about it. He said: "You cannot bear this!" So I went back again to my Lord and He relieved me of five.

I returned to Moses and told him about it. He said: "You cannot bear this." I replied: "I am embarrassed before my Lord [to ask for further reduction], so I will forbear them." Someone then called out to me: "Since you have decided to forbear, these five shall be equivalent to fifty. Every prayer is equivalent to ten. Whoever from your nation is about to do a good deed and does so, I will record it ten-fold for him. If he does not do so, I will record one for him. Whoever from your nation is about to do an evil deed

and does so, I will record one for him. If he does not do so, I will not record [it] against him."

Imam al-Ṣādiq then said: May God give a good reward to Moses on behalf of this nation. The above was the exegesis of God's words: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing* (17:1).[1]

Author's comment: Similar stories to the above are found in very many Shia and Sunni narrations. The phrase *rajulan ādaman* in the above narration means a colored man. *Ṭāmmah* is an intense happening that overwhelms everything else. That is why the resurrection is called *al-ṭāmmah* [79:34]. *Aktāf* is the plural of *katif*, meaning shoulder. In the above hadith it means edges or sides.[2] The words: "It occurred to God's Messenger that he was it," means that he was the angel who regulates the world's affair and to whom every affair goes back. The word Shanuwwah or Shanūʾah is the name of a tribe whose people were known for their height. The word *ashmaṭ* is from *shamaṭ*, meaning white hair mixed with black. *Zaghab* refers to the first small hairs and feathers that appear [on an animals' body]. *Bakht* (Bactrian) is a Khurāsānian camel. *Duliyy* is the plural of *dalw* (bucket), in the form of *fuʿūl*. *Ṣabābah* is tender longing or love. *Ḍabābah* means delicate cloud.[3]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:

When God's Messenger was taken on the night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis (the House of Holiness, in Jerusalem), Gabriel carried him on the *burāq*. They arrived at Bayt al-Maqdis and Gabriel showed him the prayer niches (sing. *miḥrāb*) of the [previous] prophets, and he prayed in them. Gabriel then took him back, and on his way back the Messenger of God passed by a caravan

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of the author's father, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmayr, on the authority of Hishām b. Sālim.

2 The hadith says *aknāf*, which differs from *aktāf* by only one dot. *Aknāf* is the plural of *kanaf*, which means side or zone, so the meaning is direct and clear. Apparently there was a mistake in either typing the author's correct writing, or perhaps a mistake by the author in recording the word here. (Trans.)

3 This shows that, according to the author, both words are possible in the above narration, although the latter has been recorded. (Trans.)

belonging to Quraysh. One of their camels was lost and they were looking for it, while they also had some water in a vessel. The Messenger of God drank from that water and poured the rest on the ground.

When he woke up in the morning, the Messenger of God said to Quraysh: "Surely God took me on a night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis and showed me the traces and stations of the [previous] prophets. I also passed by a caravan belonging to Quraysh in such and such a place. They had lost one of their camels. I drank from their water and poured the rest away."

Abū Jahl said [to Quraysh]: "Now he is in your hands and you can ask him about the number of pillars and lamps there [in Bayt al-Maqdis]." They said: "O Muḥammad! There are some people here who have entered Bayt al-Maqdis, so describe to us how many pillars, lamps and prayer niches there are." Gabriel then came and portrayed a picture of Bayt al-Maqdis in front of him. So the Prophet began answering them. When he told them that they said: "[We shall wait] until the caravan arrives and we will ask them about what you said." God's Messenger told them: "A confirmation for that [which I said] is that the caravan will show up upon sunrise, being led by a dusky white camel."

The next morning they came out looking at the pass [at the entrance of Mecca] and saying: "The sun is just about to rise." Just as the sun rose above the horizon they saw the caravan, headed by a dusky white camel. They asked them about what the Messenger of God had said, and they replied: "This is what [happened]. One of our camels got lost in such and such a place. We put our water down. Then, when we woke up in the morning, our water had been poured out." Yet, this [confirmation] only made them more defiant.[1]

Author's comment: There are other narrations to the same effect reported by both sects.

(3) ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās said:

When the Messenger of God was taken on the night journey to

1 Ṣadūq's *Amālī,* on the authority of his father, on the authority of ʿAlī [b. Ibrāhīm], on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Abān b. ʿUthmān.

heaven, Gabriel took him to a river called al-Nūr (Light). God has referred to this in the verse: *And [He] made the darkness and the light* (6:1). When He took him there, Gabriel said to him: "O Muḥammad! Cross it by God's blessing, for He has illuminated your sight and opened the way before you. This river has not been crossed by anyone—neither an intimate angel nor a messenger prophet. Only I dip in it once a day and then come out and flap my wings. There is not a single drop that falls from my wings except that it is turned by God to an intimate angel that has twenty thousand faces and forty thousand tongues, each tongue speaking a language not understood by the other tongues."

God's Messenger crossed [it] until he arrived at the veils. There were five hundred veils, and from one veil to another was a journey of five hundred years. He [Gabriel] said: "Advance, O Muḥammad." He asked: "Gabriel, why are you not coming with me?" He replied: "I am not allowed to pass beyond this point." So God's Messenger advanced as much as God wanted him to advance, until he heard the Lord say: "I am al-Maḥmūd (the Praised) and you are Muḥammad (lit. "very praised"). I derived your name from My Name . I will maintain good relations with whoever maintains good relations with you. I will cut from whoever cuts from you. Descend to My servants and tell them about how I have honored you. I have never sent a prophet without appointing a vizier for him. Indeed you are My messenger and indeed ʿAlī is your vizier."[1]

(4) Ibn ʿAbbās said:

He—that is, the Messenger of God—heard a voice saying: "We believe in the Lord of all the Worlds." He—that is, Gabriel—said: "These are Pharaoh's magicians." He [the Prophet] heard: "Here I come, O God, here I come (*labbayka Allāhumma labbayka*). He [Gabriel] said: "These are the pilgrims." He [the Prophet] heard an exclamation of "God is greater" (*takbīr*). He [Gabriel] said: "These are the soldiers." He [the Prophet] heard an exclamation of "Glory be to God" (*tasbīḥ*). He [Gabriel] said: "These are the prophets." Then, when he reached the farthest lote-tree and arrived at the veils, Gabriel said: "Proceed, O Messenger of God.

1 Ṣadūq's *Amālī*, via its chain of narration.

I am not allowed to pass beyond this point. Should I approach by a fingertip, I will surely burn."[1]

(5) Ibn ʿAbbās said:

Part of the Prophet's argument against the Jews was: I was carried on Gabriel's wings until I ended up in the seventh heaven. I then passed the farthest lote-tree, where there is the Garden of Abode (*jannat al-maʾwā*), until I clung to the leg of the throne. I was called from the leg of the throne: "Verily I am God. There is no god but I. I am the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness, the Affectionate, the All-Merciful." I then saw Him with my heart but I did not see Him with my eye…[2]

(6) Abū al-Rabīʿ said:

We went on pilgrimage with Imam al-Bāqir in the year when Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik went on pilgrimage. Nāfiʿ—Mawlā (client, freedman) of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb—was with him. Nāfiʿ looked at Imam al-Bāqir at the corner of the House while people had gathered round him, and said: "O Commander of the Faithful! Who is this whom the people have crowded around?" He replied: "This is the prophet of the people of Kūfah. It is Muḥammad b. ʿAlī." He [Nāfiʿ] said: "Watch what I will do! I shall ask him some questions that only a prophet, a prophet's successor or a prophet's son will [be able to] answer. He said: "Go ahead and ask him; perhaps you can embarrass him!"

So Nāfiʿ came along, leaned over until his shadow was cast upon the Imam. He said: "O Muḥammad b. ʿAlī! Verily I have read the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and the Qur'an (Furqān) and I have learnt what is lawful and unlawful in them. I have come to ask you questions which only a prophet, a prophet's successor or a prophet's son can answer." Imam al-Bāqir raised his head and said: "Go ahead! Ask whatever is on your mind."

He [Nāfiʿ] said: "Tell me how many years there were between Jesus and Muḥammad?" He replied: "Shall I tell you this according to my view or your view?" He replied: "According to both views." He said: "According to my view, five hundred years. According

1 *Al-Manāqib*

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj.*

to your view, six hundred years." He [Nāfiʿ] said: "Then tell me about God's words: *And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before you: Did We ever appoint gods to be worshiped besides the Beneficent?* (43:45). Whom did Muḥammad ask given that there were five hundred years between him and Jesus?"
The Imam then recited this verse: "*Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs* (17:1)" and said: "One of the signs that God showed Muḥammad when He took him on the night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis was that He gathered all of the prophets and messengers, from the first to the last. On His command Gabriel called the adhān and recited the iqāmah, repeating each part of both twice. In his call to prayer he said: 'Hasten to the best of deeds.' Muḥammad then stepped forward and led their prayer. When he finished, he asked them: 'What is your testimony? And whom did you serve?' They replied: 'We testify that there is no god but God alone; He has no partner; and verily you are God's messenger. Our covenants and oaths were taken on this.'"
Nāfiʿ then said: "You have spoken the truth, O Abū Jaʿfar."[1]

(7) Thābit b. Dīnār said:
I asked Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn about God: "Can He be described in terms of location?" He replied: "Far be God from that!" I asked: "Then why did He take His Prophet Muḥammad to heaven on the night journey?" He replied: "To show him the Dominion of heavens, the wonders that He has fashioned therein, and the marvels of His creation." I then asked: "What about God's words: *Then he drew near and suspended hung so he was the measure of two bows or closer still* (53:8-9)?" He replied: "That [means] God's Messenger drew near to the veils of light and saw the Dominion of heavens. Then he suspended hung and looked beneath, at the Dominion of Earth, until he thought that he was near to the Earth, like the measure of two bows or closer still.[2]

(8) Ismāʿīl al-Juʿfī said:
I was sitting in the Sacred Mosque and Imam al-Bāqir was also

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration.

there. He lifted his head and looked once to heaven and once at the Kaʿbah. He then recited: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque* (17:1) and repeated it three times. He then turned to me and asked: "What do the people of Iraq say about this verse, O Iraqi?" I replied: "They say that he was taken on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque to Bayt al-Maqdis." So he said: "It is not as they say. Rather, he was taken on a night journey from this to this," pointing to heaven with his hand, "and the distance between them is a sacred sanctuary (*ḥaram*)."[1]

The Imam continued: "Then when he ended up at the farthest lote-tree, Gabriel stayed behind him. God's Messenger asked him: 'Gabriel, will you desert me in a place like this?' He replied: 'Proceed ahead. I swear by God, you have reached a place where none of God's creatures have reached before you.' [The Prophet said:] 'I then saw my Lord while the *sabḥah* blocked between us.'"

I [Ismāʿīl al-Juʿfī] asked: "What is the *sabḥah*, may I be ransomed for you?" He [Imam al-Bāqir] signaled with his face to the earth and pointed to heaven with his hand, saying thrice: "The majesty of my Lord, the majesty of my Lord."

[The Imam continued, narrating from the Prophet:] He [God] said, "O Muḥammad!" I said: "I am here, my Lord." He asked: "What is the dispute in the Highest Council (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*)[2] about?" I replied: "Glory be to You. I have no knowledge apart from what You have taught me." God then placed His hand on my breast and I felt the coldness of it between my shoulders. Thereafter He did not ask me about anything of the past or the future except that I knew it. He then asked: "O Muḥammad! What is the dispute in the Highest Council about?" I replied: "It is about the ranks [of individuals], the expiations [of sins], and the rewards [of good deeds]." He said: "O Muḥammad, your term is [almost] over and you have consumed your ordained sustenance. So who is going to be your successor?" I replied: "My Lord, surely I have tested Your creatures but I have not seen anyone among

1 That is, the Prophet was taken from the Sacred Mosque to the heaven, as the author has clarified in his comments below. (Trans.)

2 See verse 38:69. (Trans.)

them who is more obedient to me than ʿAlī." He [God] added: "And [the most obedient] to Me as well, O Muḥammad." I continued: "My Lord, I have tested Your creatures but I have not seen anyone among them who loves me more intensely than ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib." He [God] added: "And [loves] Me [more than others] as well, O Muḥammad. Give him the glad tidings that he is the sign of guidance, the leader of My friends, a light for whoever obeys Me, and the lasting word that I have made inseparable from the God-fearing.[1] Whoever loves him loves Me, and whoever hates him hates Me. Moreover, I have favored him by what I have not favored anyone [else]." I said: "My Lord, [he is] my brother, my companion, my vizier and my heir." He said: "Verily it is predestined that he shall be tested [by tribulations] and others shall be tested by him. This is while I have gifted him, gifted him, gifted him and gifted him—four gifts, the tie of which are in his hand, but he does not divulge their ties."[2]

Author's comment: When the Imam's says, "Rather, he was taken on a night journey from this to this," it means from the Kaʿbah to al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr. This, however, does not deny the night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis. Neither does it mean that "the Farthest Mosque" in the verse is interpreted as al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr. Rather what is meant is to deny that the night journey ended at Bayt al-Maqdis without going beyond it. There are extensive traditions explaining the Farthest Mosque as Bayt al-Maqdis.

When the Prophet says, "I then saw my Lord," it means: "I saw Him with the eye of my heart," as we saw in some narrations before.[3] There are also other narrations that have interpreted "seeing" as such. "The *sabḥah* blocked between us" means: I reached such station and level of nearness that there was nothing left between me and Him except His majesty. "He then placed His hand on my breast…" is an allusion to divine mercy. It is essentially the revelatory descent of knowledge directly from Him (*min ladunhū*) to the Prophet's heart in a way that dispelled all uncertainty or doubt.

(9) The Messenger of God said:

1 The "lasting word" (*kalimatan bāqiyah*) is mentioned in verse 43:28. The word that is bound to the God-fearing is mentioned in verse 48:26. (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration.

3 See narration 5 above. (Trans.)

I was brought the *burāq*, which is a long white beast that is taller than a donkey but shorter than a mule. It steps as far as it can see. I rode it until I reached Bayt al-Maqdis, I tied it to a ring where the prophets used to tie [their mounts], then I entered the mosque and prayed two units (sing. *rakʿah*) of prayer inside.

I then left and Gabriel brought me a cup of wine and a cup of milk. I chose the milk. Gabriel said: "You have chosen the *fiṭrah* (primordial nature)."

We [I and Gabriel] were then up to the lowest heaven and Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked [by the guardian angel there]: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Adam. He welcomed me and prayed for my good.

We were then taken up to the second heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw the two maternal cousins, Jesus son of Mary and John son of Zechariah. They welcomed me and prayed for my good.

We were then taken up to the third heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Joseph, who has been given a fair share of beauty. He welcomed me and prayed for my good.

We were then taken up to the fourth heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Enoch (Idrīs). He welcomed me and prayed for my good.

We were then taken up to the fifth heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad."

He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Aaron. He welcomed me and prayed for my good.
We were then taken up to the sixth heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Moses. He welcomed me and prayed for my good.
We were then taken up to the seventh heaven. Gabriel asked for it to be opened. He was asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." He was asked: "And who is with you?" He replied: "Muḥammad." He was asked: "Has he been sent [to his people] yet?" He replied: "He has been sent." He then opened up for us, and there I saw Abraham, leaning his back against al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr . It is visited by seventy thousand angels every day who do not visit it again ever after.
I was then taken to the farthest lote-tree. Its leaves were like elephant ears and its fruits were like large earthenware jars. When it was covered with what covered it[1] according to God's command, its appearance changed such that none of God's creatures could describe its beauty. What was revealed to me was revealed[2] and fifty daily prayers were imposed upon me.
Then I descended until I reached Moses. He asked me: "What has your Lord imposed upon your nation?" I replied: "Fifty prayers." He said: "Go back to your Lord and ask Him to reduce it, because your nation will not have the strength to bear it. Indeed I have tried and tested the Israelites." I went back to my Lord and said: "Lord, lighten my nation's load." He reduced five [of them] for me. I went back to Moses and said: "He reduced five for me." He replied: "Verily your nation will not have the strength to bear that, so go back to your Lord and ask him for a reduction."
I kept going back and forth between my Lord and Moses until He said: "O Muḥammad! There shall be five prayers in a day and night. Every prayer is worth ten, making fifty prayers. I will record

1 See verse 53:16. (Trans.)

2 See verse 53:10. (Trans.)

one good deed for whoever intends to do a good deed but then does not do it. If he does it, I will record ten. I will not record a bad deed for whoever intends to do a bad deed but then does not do it. If he does it, I will record [just] one bad deed."

I descended until I reached Moses and told him about it. He said: "Go back to your Lord and ask him for a discount." I said: "I have gone back to my Lord to the point that I am embarrassed of Him."[1]

Author's comment: This narration is reported on the authority of Anas by various chains. One of these accounts is the next hadith:

(10) Anas said:

Three individuals came to the Messenger of God while he was sleeping in the Sacred Mosque, while he had not yet received revelation . The first of them asked: "Which of them is he?" The middle one replied: "He is [or must be] the best of them." One of them said: "Take the best one." This is how that night ended, and he did not see them until they came to him another night, when his heart could see and was not asleep even though his eyes were asleep. Thus are all prophets: their eyes sleep but not their hearts. [When they came the second time] they did not speak to him, but they carried him and placed him at the well of Zamzam. Gabriel took over from them and cleft open between his neck and his upper chest. He [Gabriel] emptied out his chest and heart, and washed it by hand with water from Zamzam, to the point that he had purified his heart. He then brought a golden bowl replete with belief and wisdom, filled his chest and the viens of his throat (*laghādīd*) with it, then closed them up. Thereafter, he took him up to the lowest heaven…[2] (The rest of the hadith is more or less the same as the previous one.)

Author's comment: What this hadith says—about cleaving open, washing and purifying the Prophet's inside, and then filling it with belief and wisdom—describes the Prophet's spiritual state where he observed

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority Ibn Abī Shaybah, Muslim and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority Thābit, on the authority of Anas.

2 Reported by Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Sharīk b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abū Namir, concerning the night when the Messenger of God was taken on a journey from the mosque where Kaʿbah is.

this imaginal illustration. It was not a physical operation as some may have thought. This is shown by the idea that he was filled with belief and wisdom [which are not material]. The narrations on the Prophet's ascension (*miʿrāj*) are full of imaginal illustrations[1] and spiritual metaphors. This idea is seen in a number of narrations on the ascension reported in Sunni sources, and obviously there is no problem with this.

The above narration suggests that his ascension was before his prophetic mission started, and that it was in a dream. As for its being before the start of his mission, it is refuted by most narrations about the night journey (*isrāʾ*), which are too numerous to mention. This is agreed upon by the scholars of this subject.

Furthermore, the narration itself refutes the idea that the night journey took place before the start of the Prophet's mission. This is because it contains the imposition of prayer, initially being fifty, followed by [the Prophet's] request for reduction as per Moses' suggestion. It does not make sense to impose the prayer before the prophetic mission. Therefore, we should perhaps interpret the beginning of the hadith as follows: The angels initially came to him before he received revelation, then they left him, and then they returned to him another night after he was chosen as a prophet. Some narrations say that those who were sleeping next to him in the Mosque on the night he was taken on the night journey were Ḥamzah b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and Abū Ṭālib's sons Jaʿfar and ʿAlī.

As for what it says about its happening in a dream, it might refer—although it is unlikely—only to the story of cleaving open and washing [the heart]. However, the narration apparently suggests that the entire night journey took place in a dream, as also suggested in some narrations below.

(11) Whenever Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān was asked about the Prophet's night journey, he would say: It was a true dream from God.[2]

Author's comment: The apparent meaning of the noble verse: *Glory*

1 What is meant here is "imaginal" in a metaphysical sense, not something imaginary and illusory. An imaginal illustration (*mithāl or tamaththulāt*) is a reality that is immaterial but not formless. It pertains to the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), which is an intermediate realm between the natural world—where there is both form and matter—and the transcendental or intellectual world—where there is neither form nor matter. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Jarīr.

be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night… so that We may show to him some of Our signs (17:1) refutes this, as do the verses at the beginning of Chapter 53. For example: *The eye did not turn aside, nor did it exceed the limit. Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord* (53:17-18). Furthermore, the verses involve a context of describing God's blessing upon His prophet. They entail God's praise by referring to His amazing mercy and astonishing power. This does not comply with a dream by the Prophet, for all good and evil people have dreams. In fact, a wicked sinner may have a more amazing dream than a God-fearing believer. A dream is deemed by most people as a matter of imagination that is no proof for one's power or authority. A dream is at most a good omen that can create positive hopes, or a bad sign that can cause fear.

(12) ʿĀʾishah said:

> I did not miss the body of God's Messenger's. Rather, God took [only] his spirit on a night journey.[1]

Author's comment: This is refuted by what refuted the previous narration. Furthermore, the narration is discredited by the consensus of transmitters of hadith and the biographers of the Prophet that the night journey took place a while before the migration, while ʿĀʾishah was conducted to him as his wife some time after the migration. This is unanimously agreed upon. The verse also explicitly refers to his being sent on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque [which is in Mecca].

(13) The Messenger of God said:

> I met Abraham on the night I was sent on the night journey and he said: pass on my greeting of peace (*salām*) to your nation and tell them that the soil of Paradise is good and its water is sweet. Its land is wide and level, and its seedlings are "Glory be to God," "Praise be to God," "There is no god but God," "God is greater" and "There is no movement or might save by God."[2]

(14) The Messenger of God said:

> When I was sent on the night journey to heaven, I entered heaven and came across one of the trees of heaven. I did not see any tree in heaven that was more beautiful, had whiter leaves, or bore more

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Tirmidhī—who has authenticated it, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

delicious fruits than that. I picked one of its fruits and ate it. That became a seed in my loins. Then, when I descended to earth, I came to Khadīja and she conceived Fāṭimah. So whenever I long for the smell of heaven, I breathe in Fāṭimah's fragrance.[1]

(15) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:
God's Messenger would kiss Fāṭima frequently, and ʿĀʾishah disapproved of that to him. God's Messenger told her: O ʿĀʾishah, when I was taken on the night journey to heaven, I entered heaven and Gabriel drew me close to the tree of Ṭūbā and offered me some of its fruit to eat. So I ate it and God turned that into water in my back. Then when I descended to earth, I came to Khadīja and she conceived Fāṭima. I have not kissed her once without sensing of Ṭūbā tree from her.[2]

(16) Ibn ʿUmar said:
When the Prophet was taken on the night journey to heaven, the call to prayer was revealed to him; Gabriel brought it down and taught it to him.[3]

(17) It is narrated from ʿAlī:
The Prophet was taught the call to prayer and prayer was imposed on him the night he was taken on the journey.[4]

(18) Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār says:
I asked Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Jaʿfar: "How did prayer become one bow and two prostrations? How come there are not two bows as there are two prostrations?"
He replied: "Now that you have asked something, clear out your heart to understand. Verily the first prayer prayed by God's Messenger was in heaven before God, before His Throne, Majestic is His Majesty. That is because when he was taken on the night journey and he came before God's Throne, He said: 'O Muḥammad, approach [the fountain of] Ṣād and wash and cleanse

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Maḥbūb, on the authority of Ibn Riʾāb, on the authority of Abū ʿUbaydah.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ* .

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

the parts on which you prostrate.' God's Messenger approached where God had commanded him and performed ablution, performing it perfectly. He then stood facing the Almighty. He [God] ordered him to commence the prayer, and so he did.

He then said: 'O Muḥammad, recite: *In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to God, Lord of the Worlds* (1:1-2)…' to the end of the chapter. Thus he did. He then told him to recite the pedigree of his Lord: *'In the Name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend* (112:1-2).' Then God paused. So the Messenger of God said: [In the Name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate.] *Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend*. He then said: 'Say: *He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him* (112:3-4).' Then God paused. So the Messenger of God said: 'Thus is God, my Lord. Thus is God, my Lord.' When he said that, God said: 'Bow to your Lord, O Muḥammad.' So God's Messenger bowed. He told him while he was bowing: 'Say: Glorify and praise be to my Lord, the Magnificent (*al-ʿAẓīm*).' He said this thrice. He then said: 'Lift your head, O Muḥammad.' God's Messenger did so and stood up straight before God. He then said: 'Prostrate, O Muḥammad, to your Lord.' So God's Messenger prostrated himself. He then said: 'Say: Glorify and praise be to my Lord, the Highest (*al-Aʿlā*).' God's Messenger did so thrice. He then said: 'Sit up straight, O Muḥammad.' So he did. When he sat up straight, he he noticed the Majesty of his Lord, Majestic is His Majesty. So God's Messenger prostrated himself of his own accord, not following a command from his Lord.

He glorified Him again thrice. Then God said: 'Stand up straight.' He did so, but this time he did not see what he had seen the first time of the greatness of his Lord. God said: 'Recite, O Muḥammad, and do what you did in the first unit (*rakʿah*).' God's Messenger did so. When he made the first prostration and lifted his head up, he noticed the Majesty of his Lord. So the Messenger of God prostrated himself of his own accord, not following a command from his Lord, and glorified Him like before. God then said to him: 'Lift your head up—may God make you steadfast. Testify as follows: 'There is no god but God, that Muḥammad is God's messenger, that the hour is coming—there is no doubt

about it—and that God resurrects those in the graves. O, God, send peace upon Muḥammad and Muḥammad's family as You sent peace, blessing and mercy upon Abraham and Abraham's family. Verily You are Praiseworthy, Glorious. O God, accept his intercession on behalf of his nation and raise his rank.' He [the Messenger of God] did so.

God then said: 'O Muḥammad!' The Messenger of God faced his Lord with his head lowered [in humility], and said: 'Peace be upon You.' The Almighty, Majestic is His Majesty, replied: 'And upon you be peace, O Muḥammad! I have given you strength by My bounty to be obedient to Me, and I have appointed you as a prophet and beloved by My protection.'"

Imam al-Kāẓim then said: "The prayer he was commanded [to perform] was only two bows and two prostrations [in total], but he prostrated twice in every *rakʿah*, as I told you, because of his remembrance of the greatness of his Lord. Thereafter, God imposed it as a duty."

I [Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār] said: "May I be made your sacrifice! What is Ṣād, from [the water of] which he was commanded to bathe?" He replied: "It is a spring which gushes from one of the pillars of the Throne. It is said to be the water of life. It is what God has said: *Ṣād, I swear by the Qur'an, full of admonition* (38:1). He commanded him to perform [minor] ablution, recite [the Qur'an], and pray.[1]

Author's comment: There are other narrations to the same effect.

(19) Abū Baṣīr asked Imam al-Ṣādiq:

"May I be made your sacrifice! How many times was God's Messenger taken on a night journey?" He replied: "Twice. Gabriel made him stand in a place and told him: '[Behold] your place, O Muḥammad! Indeed you have stood in a place where no angel or prophet has ever stood. Verily your Lord is [ever] praying.' He asked: 'O Gabriel, how does He pray?' He replied: 'He says: All Glory and Sanctity is due to Me, the Lord of the angels and the Spirit. My mercy has taken precedence to My wrath.' He [the Messenger of God] then said: 'O, God! [I beg] Your pardon, [I beg] Your pardon!' "

1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration.

> The Imam continued: "He [the Prophet] was, as God has said, *at the measure of two bows or closer still* (53:9)." Abū Baṣīr asked: "May I be made your sacrifice! What is the measure of two bows or closer still?" He said: "[The distance between] the grip and the head of a bow." The Imam then continued: "There was a gleaming veil between them, and all I know is that he [the Prophet] said: 'It was of chrysolite.' He then looked through something like the eye of a needle at what God willed of the light of His greatness…"[1]

Author's comment: The verses at the beginning of Chapter 53 support what the above narration says about the night journey taking place twice. The reliability of this narration is furthered increased by what it says about His *ṣalāh* (prayer), because the root meaning of *ṣalāh* is inclination and disposition. God's "prayer"—that is, inclination—would be His mercy, and a servant's inclination would be *duʿāʾ* (prayer, supplication), as it has been said. This is confirmed by Gabriel's description of His *ṣalāh* as: "My mercy has taken precedence to My wrath."

That is also why Gabriel made him stand where he did, and told him that it was where no one before him had trodden. The implication of this statement is that the place was the border between the creation and the Creator. Meanwhile, the pinnacle of perfection to be reached by a human is the border at which divine mercy appears and is effused upon everything else. That is why he made him stand [there] to witness it.

(20) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* has summarized some narrations as follows:

> The Prophet said: Gabriel came to me while I was in Mecca [that is, the Sacred Mosque] and said, "Stand up [and let us go], O Muḥammad!" I stood up and headed for the door with him. There I saw that he had come with Michael and Seraphiel (Isrāfīl). Gabriel then brought the *burāq*. It was taller than a donkey but shorter than a mule. Its cheek was like a person's cheek and its tail was like a cow's tail. Its mane was like a horse's mane and its legs were like a camel's legs. A saddle from heaven was upon it and it had two wings from its two thighs. Its step reached the farthest point within its sight. Gabriel told me: "Mount!" I mounted and set out until I arrived at Bayt al-Maqdis…
>
> The hadith carries on until where he [the Prophet] says: When I

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamzah who was present during the conversation.

arrived at Bayt al-Maqdis, I saw angels descending from heaven with glad tidings and honor from the Lord of Might. I prayed in Bayt al-Maqdis.

Some narrations say: Abraham gave me glad tidings while he was among a group of prophets.

The Prophet then describes Moses and Jesus, and continues:

Then Gabriel took my hand to the rock and sat me on it. All of a sudden I saw a ladder (*miʿrāj*) to heaven. I had never seen the like of it in beauty and excellence. I ascended to the lowest heaven and saw its wonders, dominion and angels that greeted me. Gabriel then took me up to the second heaven, where I saw Jesus son of Mary and John son of Zechariah. He then took me up to the third heaven, where I saw Joseph. He then took me up to the fourth heaven, where I saw Enoch (Idrīs). He then took me up to the fifth heaven, where I saw Aaron. He then took me up to the sixth heaven, where I saw many creatures surging on one another. There were also cherubs there . He then took me up to the seventh heaven, where I saw some creatures and angels.

According to Abū Hurayrah's narration: I saw Moses in the sixth heaven and saw Abraham in the seventh heaven.

We then passed it rising to the Loftiest Heights (*aʿlā ʿilliyyīn*).

The Prophet describes that place until he says:

My Lord then spoke to me and I spoke to Him. I saw heaven and hell. I saw the Throne and the farthest lote-tree and then I returned to Mecca. The next morning when I told the people about it, Abū Jahl and the polytheists called me a liar, and Muṭʿim b. ʿAdiyy told me: "Do you suppose that you traveled a two-month journey in an hour? I testify that you are a liar."

The narrators have said: Quraysh then said, "Tell us what you saw." So the Prophet replied: "I passed by the caravan of tribe so-and-so [specifying its name]. They had lost one of their camels and were looking for it. In their luggage there was a huge jar full of water. I drank the water and then covered the jar. Ask them if they found the water in the cup [that is, the jar]." They replied: "This is one sign." He said: "I passed by the caravan of tribe so-and-so [specifying its name]. The young she-camel of so-and-so had run away and broken its hand. Ask them about that." They replied: "This is another sign." They said: "Tell us about our caravan." He replied:

"I passed by it at al-Tanʿīm." He gave them a detailed account of them and their load, and said: "It is headed by a dusky white camel that is carrying two loads. They will arrive at sunrise." They said: "This is another sign."

They then set off travelling toward the desert saying, "Muḥammad has indeed set a clear judgment between us and him.."

They sat down, waiting for the sun to rise to prove him wrong. Someone then said: "By God, the sun has risen." Another said: "By God, here are the camels, led by a dusky white one." They were astonished, yet they did not believe [in the Prophet].

(21) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:

God's Messenger prayed the Evening Prayer (*ʿishāʾ*) and the Dawn Prayer (*fajr*) in Mecca on the night he was taken on the night journey.[1]

Author's comment: Some narrations say that he prayed the Sunset Prayer (*maghrib*) in the Sacred Mosque, then he was taken on the night journey. There is no contradiction between the two narrations. Similarly there is no contradiction between his having prayed the Sunset, Evening and Morning Prayers in Mecca and the five prayers being imposed upon him in heaven on the night of the journey. This is because prayer per se had been legislated before that, but we do not know how many units (sing. rakʿah) there were at that time. We know from the Qur'an and hadith that he used to pray from the time he was chosen as a prophet. In Chapter 96, it says: *Have you seen him who forbids a servant when he prays?* (96:9-10). It is narrated that he used to lead ʿAlī and Khadījah in prayer in the Sacred Mosque some time before openly proclaiming his mission.

(22) Imam al-Bāqir said:

When God's Messenger was taken on ascension, he came down with ten *rakʿahs* of prayer, divided in [five] two-unit payers. When Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were born, God's Messenger added seven *rakʿahs* in thanks to God, and God allowed him to do so. He left the Morning Prayer alone and did not add to it because it is attended by both the angels of the night and the angels of the day. When God commanded him to reduce the prayer on journeys he relieved his nation of six *rakʿahs* and left the Sunset Prayer without any reduction. The rules of inadvertence and doubt in

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.

prayer only apply to the part added by God's Messenger, but if one falls in doubt in the [original] prescribed part, they have to start the prayer all over again.[1]

(23) Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab asked ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn:

"When was the prayer as it is today imposed upon the Muslims?" He replied: "In Medina when the call [to religion] had gained strength, Islam had become powerful, and God decreed jihad upon the Muslims. God's Messenger added seven rakʿahs to prayer: two *rakʿas* to the Noon Prayer, two *rakʿahs* to the Afternoon Prayer, one rakʿa to the Sunset Prayer and two *rakʿahs* to the Evening Prayer. He left the Dawn Prayer as it had been imposed in Mecca…"[2]

(24) Ibn ʿAbbās has narrated from the Messenger of God:

When I was taken on the night journey, a fragrant aroma passed me. I asked: "What is this fragrant aroma, O Gabriel?" He replied: "That is the hairdresser of Pharaoh's court along with her children. Once when she was combing [the hair of Pharaoh's daughter] the comb fell from her hand. She said [as she was picking it up], 'In the Name of God.' Pharaoh's daughter asked: '[Do you mean] my father?' She replied: 'Nay, but my Lord, your Lord and your father's Lord.' She asked: 'Are you saying that you have a Lord other than my father?' She replied: 'Yes.' She said [with an intimidating tone]: 'Should I tell my father about this?' She said: 'Go ahead!'

So she told her father about it and he summoned her. He asked: 'Do you have a Lord other than me?' She replied: 'Yes. My Lord and your Lord is God Who is in heaven.' He then called for a very large cauldron of copper to be heated up. Then he commanded to drop her and her children in it. She said: 'I have a request from you.' 'What is it?' he asked. She said: 'Collect my bones and the bones of my children [after our death] and bury them all.' He replied: 'That is granted to you for the service that you have done for us.' They then threw them one by one until it was the turn of her suckling infant, who [miraculously] said to his mom, 'Lament, mummy, but do not waver, for indeed you are upon the truth.'

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of al-ʿĀmirī.

2 Al-Ṣadūq's *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, via his chain of narration.

Then she and her infant were thrown in."

Ibn ʿAbbās added: There are four babies who spoke when they were little: This one, Joseph's witness, Jurayḥ's witness, and Jesus son of Mary.[1]

Author's comment: This is also narrated in a different way on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, on the authority of Ubayy b. Kaʿb, from the Prophet.

(25) The Prophet said:

On the night when I was taken on the night journey I passed by some people whose lips were being cut off by scissors of fire. Every time their lips were cut off, they would grow back again as they were. I asked: "Who are these, O Gabriel?" He replied: "These are the preachers in your nation who used to preach what they did not practice."[2]

Author's comment: Such imaginal representations (*al-tamaththulāt al-barzakhiyyah*) which depict deeds according to their results and their prepared punishments often appear in narrations on the night journey. We already saw some of them in the above narrations.

A Summary of the Narrations

The reader should know that the narrations mentioned above are just a small sample of the narrations on this topic. They are indeed numerous, reaching the level of *tawātur*.[3] They are broadly transmitted by a very large number of Companions such as Anas b. Mālik, Shaddād b. al-Aws, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Abū Hurayrah, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Masʿūd, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿUmar, ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿAbbās, Ubayy b. Kaʿb, Samurah b. Jundab, Buraydah [b. al-Ḥaṣīb], Ṣuhayb b. Sinān, Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān, Sahl b. Saʿd, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh, Abū al-Ḥamrāʾ, Abū al-Dardāʾ, ʿUrwah [b. al-Zubayr], Umm Hānī,

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Nasāʾī, al-Bazzāz, al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn al-Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*, via an authentic chain of narration.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Anas.

3 A hadith is *mutawātir* (that is, characterized by *tawātur*) if it has been mass-transmitted through numerous chains of narration, such that its recurrence leaves no doubt about its authenticity. (Trans.)

Umm Salamah, ʿĀʾishah and Asmāʾ b. Abī Bakr, all from the Messenger of God. It has also been narrated by a large number of Shia narrators on the authority of the Imams.

The scholars of Islam—whose word carries weight—agree that the night journey took place in Mecca before the migration, as can be inferred from His words: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque…* (17:1). This is also confirmed by many narrations that talk about the Prophet telling Quraysh [a Meccan tribe] about it the morning after that night, their denial of this report, and the Prophet informing them about the pillars of the Farthest Mosque and what he had encountered on the way like the caravans and so on.

But they disagree over the year in which he was taken on the night journey. The following years have been claimed:

(i) the second year of the mission, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās;
(ii) the third year, according to al-Kharāʾij [by al-Rāwandī], on the authority of ʿAlī;
(iii) the fifth or sixth year;
(iv) ten years and three months after his appointment [as prophet];
(v) the twelfth year of the mission;
(vi) one year and five months before the migration;
(vii) one year and three months before it;
(viii) six months before it.

Here we are not concerned with discussing the year, month or date of the night journey, and there is no reliable evidence for it either. However, it should be noted that some of the narrations on the authority of the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt explicitly state that there were two night journeys. This can be inferred from the verses in Chapter 53 because He says: *And certainly he saw him in another descent* (53:13). You will see this when we get there, God-willing.

Based on this, it is possible that some of the marvels that he described in some of the narrations refer to what he witnessed on the first night journey, some others refer to the second night journey, and some refer to what he witnessed on both night journeys.

The exegetes have also disagreed over the place from which he was taken on the night journey. The following origins have been claimed:

(i) From the shiʿb (mountain pass) of Abū Ṭālib.
(ii) From Umm Hānī's house, and there are some narrations that confirm this.

[Concerning these two views] some exegetes have interpreted "the Sacred Mosque" in verse 17:1 (*…made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque*) as referring to the entire *ḥaram* area (the holy precinct) by extension, which would include all of Mecca.

(iii) From the Sacred Mosque itself, as this is the literal meaning of the verse, and there is no evidence to support an extension or figurative interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of it.

Based on what we said above—that there were two night journeys—it is possible that one of the night journeys was from the Sacred Mosque and the other was from Umm Hānī's house. As for its happening from the mountain pass [of Abū Ṭalib], it does not comply with the rest of what is said in these accounts, as they say that Abū Ṭālib was looking for the Prophet all night, he and the Hāshimites (Banū Hāshim) gathered together in the Sacred Mosque, and he drew his sword and threatened Quraysh about not finding the Prophet, until he descended from heaven, went to them and told Quraysh what he had seen. None of these fit the hardship and suffering he and the Hāshimites all underwent while they were on the mountain pass.

In any event, the night journey discussed in the verse: *Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque* (17:1) was a night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis, and this started at the Sacred Mosque because that is perfectly apparent from the verse, and there is no need to interpret it figuratively.

The exegetes also disagree over how the nocturnal journey took place. The majority believe that his body and spirit were taken on the night journey from the Sacred Mosque to Bayt al-Maqdis, then from there to the heavens. A number of them believe that his body and soul were taken from Mecca to Bayt al-Maqdis, then his spirit was taken from Bayt al-Maqdis to the heavens. It is attributed to some exegetes that only his spirit was taken on the journey, meaning that it was a true dream that God showed His prophet.

Al-Manāqib says:

People disagree over the ascension (*miʿrāj*). The Khārijites deny it. The Jahmiyyah[1] say: His spirit but not his body was taken up

1 These are the followers of Jahm b. Ṣafwān, who believe in determinism (*jabr*) and that faith is only an inner belief, without any verbal or practical component. Note 2 on Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Qum: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1429), 2:340. (Trans.)

> by way of a dream. The Imamiyyah, Zaydiyyah and Muʿtazilah say on the contrary: His spirit and body were both taken to Bayt al-Maqdis because of His words: *to the Farthest Mosque…* (17:1). Others say: Rather, his spirit and body were both taken to the heavens. This [last view] is narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Jābir, Ḥudhayfah, Anas, ʿĀʾishah and Umm Hānī. We do not deny this, if there is evidence to prove it. God made Moses' ascension to the Mount [Sinai]: *And you were not on this side of the mountain…* (28:46); Abraham's to the lowest heaven: *And thus did We show Ibrahim…* (6:75); *Jesus' to the fourth: Nay! Allāh took him up to Himself…* (4:158); Idrīs' (Enoch's) to heaven: *And We raised him high [in Heaven]* (19:57); and Muḥammad's to *the measure of two bows or closer still* (53:9). This shows his [Muḥammad's] lofty purpose and will.

What should be said is that there is no way to deny the actual occurrence of the night journey because the Qur'an refers to it explicitly and there are repeatedly narrated traditions about it by the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

As for the quality of the night journey (*isrāʾ*), the verse, the narrations and their contextual and circumstantial indications are a clear evidence that both his spirit and his body were taken from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque. Concerning his ascension (*miʿrāj*) to the heaven, this is also evident based on the verses in Chapter 53—the exegesis of which is to come, God-willing—and the explicit text of numerous narrations. However, one may say that this ascension [to the heaven, after the physical night journey to Bayt al-Maqdis] was a spiritual ascension, but not in the sense suggested by those who have deemed to be as a form of dreams or visions that one sees in sleep. If that were the case, it would neither justify the ascension being a sign of God's power and esteem [of His prophet], as stated in the verses, nor would it justify Quraysh's strong denial when he told them the story. In addition, what he told them of the events along the way would have no conceivable meaning. Rather, a correct interpretation of a spiritual ascension is that his noble spirit was taken to a realm beyond the material world, inhabited by honored angels, where deeds end up and from which God's decrees issue. *He then saw some of his Lords greatest signs* (53:18) and the manifestation of the realities of things and the consequences of deeds. He saw the spirits of the greatest prophets and spoke with them, and he met the noble angels and conversed with them.

He also saw divine signs that are only metaphorically describable such as the Throne, the veil (*al-ḥujub*) and the pavilions (*al-surādiqāt*).

Since most scholars hold that immaterial existence is restricted to God, and that others are subject to the primacy of material existence, when they find the Qur'an and Sunnah describe immaterial matters in terms of specific tangible bodies or entities—such as the noble angels, the Throne, the Chair, the Tablet, the Pen, the veils and the pavilions—they have construed them as being material bodies that are imperceptible to the senses and free from the laws of matter. They have also interpreted what is said about the representations of the stations of the pious, the degrees of proximity, the hidden forms of sins, the consequences of deeds and so on as allegorical and metaphorical expressions. Thus they have fallen into sophistry by invalidating sensory perception, confirming arbitrary links between deeds and their consequences, and other pitfalls.

It is for the same reason that those scholars who have denied his material ascension to the heavens are forced to say that his ascension occurred in a dream, which, according to them, is a material property of the spirit—because they deem the spirit to also be material. Thus they have been led to reinterpret the verses and narrations as what is not appropriate to even a single one of them.

Another Discussion

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> One question is about where the Prophet was taken on the night journey. The answer is that the night journey was to Bayt al-Maqdis. This is explicitly stated in the Qur'an, and no Muslim can deny it. What some exegetes have said—that it happened in sleep—is clearly untrue because that would serve as no miracle or binding proof.
>
> There are many narrations telling the story of our Prophet's ascension to heaven, narrated by many of the companions such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Anas, Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh, Ḥudhayfah, ʿĀ'ishah, Umm Hānī and others, who have narrated from the Prophet. Some say more and some say less.
>
> What is said in these narrations can be classified into four categories:
>
> (i) That which we can be certain of its authenticity due to having

knowledge about them and their being mass-transmitted.
(ii) That which is rationally possible and does not contradict the established principles (*ūsūl*). We believe in the possibility of these, and if they happened they were while he was awake, not in sleep.
(iii) That which apparently contravenes some principles, but there can be a logical interpretation for it. It is possible to interpret it non-literally in a way which conforms to the truth and evidence.
(iv) That which is apparently not correct and which cannot be interpreted plausibly except with a lot of difficulty and abstraction from the apparent meaning. It is better not to accept it.
What is of the first type—that which is definitive—is that overall he was taken on a night journey. The second type includes narrations that he circumambulated the heavens, saw the prophets, the Throne, the farthest lote-tree, heaven, hell and so on. Some examples for the third type are narrations that he saw people living at ease in heaven and people in hell being punished there. This should be interpreted as seeing their attributes or names. The fourth type includes narrations that he literally spoke to God and saw Him [with the naked eye], sat with Him on His couch and so on, because the literal meanings of these necessitate anthropomorphism. God is far above that. Similarly there are narrations that his inside was split open and cleansed. These are also of the fourth type because he was already pure and cleansed of every evil and defect. Moreover, how can his heart and beliefs be cleansed by water?

Author's comment: His categorisation is appropriate. However, there is room for discussion over most of the examples he cites corresponding to the categories.

What he says about the circumambulation, seeing the prophets and so on are imaginal or spiritual representations (*tamaththulāt barzakhiyyah aw rūḥiyyah*). Similarly the hadith about his inside being split open and cleansed is an imaginal representation, and there is no problem with it. The hadiths on the night journey are full of reference to this kind of imagery, like the world being represented as a woman covered in all the world's finery, the representation of the Jewish and Christian proselytizers, the kinds of comfort and punishment he saw for the people of heaven and hell, respectively, and so on.

This view of ours is confirmed by the difference of expression in these

narrations despite depicting the same reality. For example, one narration says that he ascended to heaven on the *burāq*, another on Gabriel's wing, and another via a stairway set up on Bayt al-Maqdis' rock. There are other examples of this that one can find by scrutinizing these narrations. These and others like them point to the fact that such explanations are set out as imagery or figurative representations. The occurrence of such imagery in the apparent text of the Qur'an and Sunnah is certain and cannot be denied by any means.

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Verses 2-8

These verses at the beginning of the chapter apparently discuss the divine custom with regard to human communities: It is to guide them to the way of servitude and the path of monotheism, and to enable them to reach that through their own choice. That is why God has given mankind the bounties of this world [as means] and the blessings of the hereafter [as rewards], and has provided them with the means of obedience and disobedience. If they obey and do good, He will reward them with happiness in this world and the hereafter. If they disobey and do evil , He will requite them with penalty in this world and torment in the hereafter.

These seven verses present an example of the above universal custom applied to the Israelites. God revealed the Book to their prophet and made it a [source of] guidance for them to follow. He decreed that they would behave haughtily, transgress and sin. Then God would exact vengeance upon them by letting their enemy defeat, subjugate, kill and enslave them. They would then return to obedience and God would return to bestowing favors and being merciful to them. Then they would be haughty and transgress again, and thus God would exact vengeance on them again, fiercer than the first time. It is then hoped that their Lord will have mercy on them, but if they return [to mischief again], He will return [to His custom of punishment].

From this, it can be inferred that these seven verses are like an introduction to what is said next about the application of this universal custom to this nation [of Islam]. The seven verses are like a parenthetical discussion between the first verse and the ninth.

Commentary

وَآتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَلَّا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْ دُونِي وَكِيلًا ﴿٢﴾

(17:2) ***And We gave Moses the Book and made it a guidance to the children of Israel, saying*** **(an)*****: Do not take a protector*** **(wakīlan)**

besides Me.

The term "book" is often used in the Qur'an to refer to the entire set of religious injunctions that have been prescribed for the people to settle their disagreements over beliefs or actions. It involves an indication that it includes doctrinal and practical duties which they have to take on and engage in. That may be why the verse has used the word "Book" (*al-kitāb*) instead of "Torah" to show that it included codes of religious law that were "prescribed" or "written" for them.

Given this meaning of the Book, the next part of the verse (and made it a guidance to the children of Israel) is an interpretation of the first part (We gave Moses the Book). This book was guidance (*hudā*) to them, meaning that it was their guide (*hādī*), because it explained for them the religious laws of their Lord that if they were to adopt they would be guided to the truth and would attain felicity in both worlds.

…saying* (an)*: Do not take a protector* (wakīlan) *besides Me: The particle *an* (lit. "that") is explanatory. Here it means: What follows is a summary of the contents of the Book which was made guidance for them. Thus it ultimately means that in short, what the Book was explaining to them and guiding them toward was that it prohibited them from associating anything with God or adopting anyone else as a protector.

If the implied second person pronoun in "Do not take a protector besides Me" refers to the Israelites, then this statement is an interpretation of the previous part (made it a guidance to the children of Israel). But if it refers to both Moses and the Israelites, then the statement would be an interpretation for everything thus far in the verse.

There is a shift of address (*iltifāt*) in the verse from the majestic plural (the royal "We") to the first person singular. This is because the majestic plural is for aggrandizement. If the majestic plural were to be maintained to the end, then the verse would have to say: "Do not take protectors besides Us," which contravenes the sense of monotheism intended in this command. That is why there is a shift to the first person singular. Then, once this consideration is over in the next verse, it shifts back to the previous tone [of majestic plural]: *The offspring of those whom We bore with Noah* (17:3).

Adopting a *wakīl* (guardian, protector) besides God reduces to polytheism because a *wakīl* is someone who is charged with taking care of the essential affairs of his appointer (*muwakkil*) and proceeds to fulfil his

needs. This can only be God. Hence, adopting someone else as a lord is equivalent to adopting someone else as a *wakīl*

ذُرِّيَّةَ مَنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْداً شَكُوراً ﴿٣﴾

(17:3) *The offspring* (dhurriyyata) *of those whom We bore with Nūḥ; surely he was a grateful servant.*

Dhurriyyah [from a root that is used for tiny things like ants and atoms] refers to one's children, as they are small and connected to their fathers. Its inflection (in the form of *naṣb*) indicates exclusivity (*ikhtiṣāṣ*), which shows a special attention by the speaker to this description in his speech. It serves as a justification, similar to the verse: *God only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O People of the House* (Ahl al-Bayt, in the form of *naṣb*)! *and to purify you a (thorough) purifying* (33:33), which says that God wants to do this [purification] to you because you are the People of the House of prophethood. Likewise, *"The offspring of those whom We bore with Noah"* acts as a justification for what precedes it [in the previous verse], just as the subsequent part of the verse (*surely he was a grateful servant*) serves as a justification for it [that is, for the first part of the verse].

The first [justification] is inferred from the apparent meaning of the verse, which suggests that God's special attention to the Israelites was because of His previous promise to the passengers on Noah's Ark. When He rescued them from the flood He told Noah: *O Noah! descend with peace from Us and blessings on you and on the people from among those who are with you, and there shall be nations whom We will afford provisions, then a painful punishment from Us shall afflict them* (11:48). This promise was fulfilled when He revealed the Book to Moses and made it a guidance for the Israelites, as the descendants of the people of the Ark, according to God's established custom in all nations. The verses are effectively saying: We revealed the Book to Moses and made it a guidance for the Israelites because they were the offspring of those whom We bore with Noah, for We promised them peace, blessings and provisions.

The second [justification] is because this custom—that is, the custom of guiding, instructing and calling toward monotheism—is the same custom which Noah took upon himself before anyone else in the human world. By doing so he showed grateful for God's blessing and worshipped Him exclusively. It has been stated repeatedly in this *tafsīr* that gratitude

(*shukr*) is essentially concomitant to exclusive worship. God then thanked him, made his legacy survive as long as the world survives, gave him the greeting of peace in all the worlds and rewarded him for his every good word and proper deed until the Day of Resurrection. He says: *And We made his offspring the survivors. And We perpetuated to him (praise) among the later generations. Peace and salutation to Noah among the nations. Thus do We surely reward the doers of good* (37:77-80). The meaning of the two verses can be summarised as: Surely We rewarded Noah for being a grateful servant to Us. Surely We allowed his call to survive and applied his custom and way to the offspring of those whom We bore with him in the Ark. It was for this reason that we revealed the Book to Moses and made it a guidance for the Israelites.

It is deduced from *"The offspring of those whom We bore with Noah"* (17:3) and from *"And We made his offspring the survivors"* (37:77) that all people are Noah's descendants both maternally and paternally. If offspring (*dhurriyyah*) were restricted to his male line—meaning that *"those whom We bore with Noah"* only referred to his sons—then it would have been better, even incumbent, for the verse to say: "The offspring of Noah" [instead of *"The offspring of those whom We bore with Noah"*].[1]

The exegetes have many other views for the inflection (*iʿrāb*) of the [words in] the verse. For example, some have said that *dhurriyyata* is vocative, where the vocative particle *yā* (lit. "O") is omitted. The implied meaning would be: O, offspring of those whom We bore… It is also said that *dhurriyyata* is the first object of *tattakhidhū* (take, in 17:2), and its second object is *wakīlan* (protector). The implied meaning would be: Do not take the offspring of those whom We bore with Noah as protector besides Me. Others have suggested that *dhurriyyata* is in apposition to Moses in the previous verse.[2] These explanations clearly lack substance.

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1 The argument here is that according to verse 37:77, all of those who remain of the human race are Noah's descendants. Yet, verse 17:3 says that there are also descendants of others, namely Noah's companions on the Ark. Hence, putting the two verses together, it is deduced that the descendants of others from the paternal side are also descendants of Noah from the maternal side. The other possibility is that they are all the descendants of Noah's sons, who married the daughters of his companions on the Ark. (Trans.)

2 The implied meaning would be: And We gave Moses—who was the offspring of those whom We bore with Noah—the Book and made it a guidance… (Trans.)

Another such interpretation is that the pronoun "he" in "surely he was" refers to Moses instead of Noah, and thus the sentence justifies why Moses was given the Book or why Moses was made a guide for the Israelites—based on the pronoun in "and made it a guidance" [where "it" can also be translated as "he"] referring to Moses instead of the Book.

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوّاً كَبِيراً

(17:4) *And We had made known* (qaḍaynā, from qaḍāʾ) *to the children of Israel in the Book: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice, and most certainly you will behave insolently with great insolence* (ʿuluwwan).

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *Qaḍāʾ* means deciding a matter whether by word or deed. There are two kinds of each: divine and human. Examples of divine word are:
>
> *And your Lord has commanded* (qaḍā) *that you shall not serve (any) but Him.* (17:23)
>
> *And We had made known* (qaḍaynā) *to the children of Israel in the Book.* (17:4)
>
> This is *qaḍāʾ* in the sense of informing and making a decisive ruling. That is, "We informed them about this through a sure revelation to them."
>
> Similar to this is, *And We revealed* (qaḍaynā) *to him this decree, that the roots of these shall be cut off.* (15:66)
>
> Examples of divine action are:
>
> *And Allāh judges with* (yaqḍī bi) *the truth; and those whom they call upon besides Him cannot judge* (lā yaqḍūna bi) *aught.* (40:20)
>
> *So He ordained them* (fa-qaḍāhunna) *seven heavens in two periods* (41:12). This is an allusion to God's novel origination of the universe and His completion of it. The same idea is seen in the following description of God: *Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth* (2:117; 6:101).
>
> An example of human word is like a judge's verdict (*qaḍāʾ*) because a judge's decision (*ḥukm*) is oral.
>
> Examples of human action are:

> *So when you have performed* (qaḍaytum) *your devotions.* (2:200)
> *Then let them accomplish* (li-yaqḍū) *their needful acts of shaving and cleansing, and let them fulfil their vows.* (22:29)

ʿ*Uluww* means elevation, but here it is a way of referring to their transgression of limits by wrongdoing and oppression. The evidence for this meaning is an explanatory conjunction (ʿ*atf al-tafsīr*) of this term: "make mischief." The same meaning is seen in the following verse: *Surely Pharaoh exalted himself* (ʿalā) *in the land and made its people into parties* (28:4).

The implied meaning of the verse is: We informed and made it decisively known to the Israelites in the Book, that is, the Torah, that I swear and say truthfully that you people of Israel will make mischief twice in the land—the land of Palestine and its environs—one time after another. You will behave haughtily and will transgress the boundaries excessively.

فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَاداً لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ
فَجَاسُوا خِلالَ الدِّيَارِ وَكَانَ وَعْداً مَفْعُولاً ۝٥

(17:5) *So when the promise for the first of the two* (ūlāhumā) *came, We sent over you Our servants, of mighty prowess* (baʾs)*, so they went to and fro* (jāsū) *among the houses, and it was a promise to be accomplished.*

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Buʾs*, *baʾs* and *baʾsāʾ* mean hardship and unpleasantness, except that *buʾs* is used more for poverty and war, while *baʾs* and *baʾsāʾ* are used for punishment, as in: *And Allāh is strongest in prowess* (baʾsan) *and strongest to give an exemplary punishment* (4:84).

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Jaws* means going to and fro among the houses. One says: I let so-and-so step over *(yajūsu)* a certain tribe. *Yajūsuhum* and *yadūsuhum* mean: "he tramples them underfoot." Abū ʿUbayd says: Anywhere that you go and step, it is said that you *ḥustahu wa justahu*. It is also said that *jaws* means going to great lengths in search of something.

So when the promise for the first of the two came: This follows on sequentially from, *Most certainly you will make mischief* (17:4). The dual pronoun [*in ūlāhumā*] refers to the two times that they shall make mischief.

"The first of the two" means the first mischief. *"The promise for the first of the two"* means the exemplary punishment and vengeance which God promised them for their mischief. That is, "promise" (*waʿd*) here means "that which is promised" (*mawʿūd*). The "coming" of the promise is an allusion to the time when it will be fulfilled. This shows that they were given two promises for their mischief, but the verse has not mentioned two fulfillments for brevity. The verse is effectively saying: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice, and We promise you vengeance for each [time]. So when the promise for the first of the two came, We sent over you Our servants, of mighty prowess (*baʾs*), so they went to and fro (*jāsū*) among the houses, and it was a promise to be accomplished. These points are drawn from the context of the verse.

…We sent over you Our servants, of mighty prowess, so they went to and fro among the houses: That is, We made them to rise and sent them to you to subjugate you and exact vengeance on you. The idea that this raising and sending was to exact vengeance and subjugate is deduced from the subsequent part of the verse: *"servants of mighty prowess* (baʾs)*…"*

There is no harm in deeming their coming to the Israelites—along with all the killing, devastation, enslavement, imprisonment, plundering and destruction that it brought about—to be divinely sent because it was by way of punishment for their mischief in the land, their haughtiness, and their unwarranted transgressions. Thus God was not unfair to them in sending their enemies to them and supporting their enemies against them. Rather [it was] they who had wronged themselves.

Based on the above, one cannot argue that terms like "We sent" and "servants" show that these were believers; that is, We commanded "a believing people" to fight and wage holy war against you. There is no problem in attributing this act [of sending] to God so long as it is a means of punishment. Similarly, there is no problem in calling the unbelievers "God's servants" especially when they are described as "of mighty prowess."

Two other suggested interpretations are:

(1) Those who were sent were believers commanded by God to do *jihad* against the others [disobedient Israelites].

(2) Perhaps they were unbelievers with whom one of the prophets made a pact to wage war against the other unbelievers and sinners [in Israel] to rule over them. The answer to these two views is similar to what we just said [that the ascription is acceptable because it was a punishment for their own misdeeds].

…and it was a promise to be accomplished: This emphasizes that what God declared to them was decisive and certain. The implied meaning is: When the time of the first promise that We had made came about—for the first of your two mischiefs—We dispatched and raised against you servants of Ours who were of great retributive prowess from among the people. They entered your land by force and through seizure, went right into the middle of your homes, subjected you, and seized your independence, greatness and sovereignty. This was a promise to be accomplished, without any escape from it.

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيراً ﴿٦﴾

(17:6) ***Then We gave you back the turn*** **(al-karrah)** ***to prevail against them, and aided you with wealth and children and made you a numerous band*** **(nafīran).**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Karrah* means returning and coming around. *Nafīr* is a number of men. Al-Zajjāj says: It is possible that it is the plural of *nafar* (individual) just as one says *abīd*, *ḍaʾīn*, *maʿīz* and *kalīb* [for the plurals of *ʿabd* (slave), *ḍaʾn* (sheep), *maʿz* (goat) and *kalb* (dog), respectively]. A person's *nafar*, *nafr*, *nafīr* or *nāfirah* is his band that helps him and goes forth (*yanfirūna*) with him.

The meaning of the verse is clear. Its apparent meaning is that the Israelites will regain their rule over their enemies after the promise of the first round. They will defeat them, overpower them and be freed from their enslavement and captivity. This will be a gradual process over a fair period of time, as suggested by the idea of being aided by wealth and children, and being made a numerous band [in terms of size and/or strength]. The next verse (*If you do good, you will do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it shall be for them*) bears a hint, or rather a clear indication given the context, that the Israelites' second turn against their enemies was because of their return to righteousness after tasting the punishment for their initial evildoing. Similarly, the occurrence of the second promise was because of their second return to evildoing after their return to righteousness.

إِنْ أَحْسَنتُمْ أَحْسَنتُمْ لأَنفُسِكُمْ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الآخِرَةِ
لِيَسُوءُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبِّرُوا
مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيراً ﴿٧﴾

(17:7) *If you do good, you will do good for your own souls* (li-anfusikum)*, and if you do evil, it shall be for them* (lahā)*. So when the second promise came that they may bring you to grief* (li-yasūʾū) *and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy whatever they gained ascendancy over with utter destruction* (tatbīran).

The letter *lām* in *li-anfusikum* and *lahā* shows exclusivity. That is, doing good and doing evil pretains to them alone and not others. It is God's enduring custom that the consequence and result of a deed should return to the doer, whether it is good or bad. This idea is also found in: *This is a people that have passed away; they shall have what they earned and you shall have what you earn* (2:141).

The message here is that a person is responsible for the good or bad consequence of his deed, not the idea that doing good is beneficial to him and doing evil is detrimental to him. If that were the intended meaning, the verse should have said: "If you do evil, it shall be against your own souls," [instead of for your souls], as seen in the verse: *For it is (the benefit of) what it has earned and against it (the evil of) what it has wrought* (2:286).

Thus there is no need for the contrivance of some exegetes that the letter *lām* in "and if you do evil, it shall be for them (*lahā*)" means *ʿalā* (against). The same goes with others who have said that the *lām* means *ilā* (to), because that is the particle that makes *isāʾah* (doing evil) transitive, as one says: "so-and-so did evil to (*ilā*) so-and-so." The same applies to what others have said, that the *lām* indicates that they deserve the punishment, as in: *And they shall have* (lahum) *a painful chastisement* (2:10; 2:174; 3:77; 3:177; 3:188; 5:36; 9:79; 16:63; 16:104; 16:117; 59:15; 64:5).

One might argue that the *lām* cannot indicate exclusivity because the reality is different: The consequence of doing good often affects more than just the doer of the good, and the consequence of doing evil often affects more than just the evildoer, as it is evident.

The answer to this is that it overlooks the Noble Qur'an's position on

the consequences of actions. As for the eschatological consequences of actions, they do not spread beyond the doer whatsoever. He says: *Whoever disbelieves, he shall be responsible for his disbelief, and whoever does good, they prepare (good) for their own souls* (30:44). As for consequences in this world, actions do not affect anyone apart from the doer unless God wishes otherwise—as a means of blessing, punishing or testing someone else. It is not always within the doer's power to make the consequence of his action reach others, except for when God wants that. However the consequences, whether good or bad, always reach the doer without exception.

The doer of good gets a share of the good that he does, and the doer of evil gets a share of the evil that he does. He says: *So he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it and he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.* (99:7-8). Thus the consequence of an action does not leave the doer for anyone else. This is the meaning of what is narrated from ʿAlī: "You do not do anyone any good or harm"—and then he recited this verse [as evidence].

So when the second promise came that they may bring you to grief* (li-yasūʾū)*: *Tatbīr* means destruction. It is derived from *tabār* which means ruin and destruction.

Li-yasūʾū is derived from *masāʾah* . The verb *sāʾa* is used when one causes grief for someone else. The letter *lām* [in *Li-yasūʾū*] is purposive, and it is said that there is an implied verb that is omitted for brevity.[1] The implied meaning is: We sent them[2] to bring you grief by the appearance of sorrow, desolation, and signs of subjugation, abjection and the humiliation of enslavement on your faces. They will do so by their massacre, imprisonment and plunder against you.

…and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time: Mosque here means the Farthest Mosque (al-Masjid al-Aqṣā): Bayt al-Maqdis. Some exegetes have suggested that it means the entire holy land by extension, but there are no grounds for this interpretation. The following points can be deduced from the verse:

1. They [the enemies] also entered the mosque by force upon the first promise. This was not previously mentioned for the sake of brevity.

2. Their entry into the mosque was just to desecrate and destroy it.

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1 In other words, the causing event or action is not explicitly mentioned, but its result is "that they may bring you to grief." (Trans.)

2 This is the omitted implied verb. (Trans.)

3. Apparently the attackers that were sent [by God] to punish the Israelites and take revenge on them are the same ones who were dispatched against them the first time.

and that they might destroy whatever* (mā) *they gained ascendancy over with utter destruction: That is: The above [attack] was so that they may destroy what they had won by taking lives, burning properties, demolishing buildings and destroying the country. Another possibility is that the particle *mā* is infinitival (*maṣdariyyah*)[1], with an omitted annexed word. In that case, the implied meaning would be: That they might destroy utterly throughout the period of their ascendancy.[2] The first interpretation springs more readily to mind and fits the context better. The analogy drawn between the two promises—that is, We sent over you Our servants, and that they may bring you to grief—shows that the second one was worse and bitterer for the Israelites. They were nearly exterminated and driven to extinction. The phrase "destroy with utter destruction" suffices to show this.

The meaning is: So when the promise came the last time—after your second mischief—We sent them to bring you grief—through the appearance of sorrow, depression, humiliation and wretchedness in your faces—and so that they might enter the Farthest Mosque as they had entered it the first time, to destroy what they had won and ruin anything that they passed over by demolishing and killing.

عَسَى رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يَرْحَمَكُمْ وَإِنْ عُدْتُمْ عُدْنَا وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيراً ﴿٨﴾

(17:8) *It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, and if you again return We too will return, and We have made hell a prison* (ḥaṣīran) *for the unbelievers.*

Ḥaṣīr is derived from *ḥaṣr,* which means straitening and detaining. He says: *wa uḥṣurūhum* (9:5), which means: *and besiege them.*

The clause, *It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you…* refers

1 The function of such a particle is that it turns the following verb into an infinitive. (Trans.)

2 Hence, what is omitted is "period of" and the particle *mā* serves to convert "gained ascendancy" (verb) to "ascendancy" (as an infinitive). (Trans.)

to after the second dispatch, according to the context of the verses. It gives hopes of mercy, on the condition that they repent and return to obedience and doing good, as evidenced by His Words: and if you again return We too will return. That is, if you return to mischief and haughtiness again after coming back from it and after your Lord's mercy on you, then We will return to punishment and making an example [out of you]. We have made hell a prison and place of detainment for the unbelievers from which they cannot escape.

This sentence [*It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you*] involves a shift from the majestic plural to the third person. The reason for this is to indicate that the default position dictated by God's Lordship: to have mercy on His servants as long as they follow what their creation entails and what their primary nature (*fiṭrah*) directs them toward, unless they deviate from the line of their creation and leave the path of their primary nature. The allusion to this point makes it necessary to mention the divine attribute "Lord," and that is why there was a need to shift the tone from the majestic plural to the third person. Then, once the point has been made fully (by saying: *It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you*) the verse's expression returns to the way it was.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said:

Noah was called a grateful servant because he used to utter every morning and evening: "O God, verily I take You as witness that any blessing or well-being in religious or worldly affairs that comes upon me in the evening or the morning is from You alone. You have no partner. To You I owe all praise and thank for it until You are satisfied and after Your satisfaction."[1]

Author's comment: The same thing with slight variations is narrated via various routes in *al-Kāfī*, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

(2) The Prophet said:

Noah would not carry anything, big or small, without saying: "In the Name of God. Praise be to God." That is why God called him

1 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Ibn Bābawayh, via his chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

a grateful servant.[1]

Author's comment: The narrations do not contradict the explanation of *shukr* as sincerity above, for indeed his supplication was out of his actualization of the reality of his supplication. That is inseparable from sincerity in servitude.

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:

And We had made known to the children of Israel in the Book: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice (17:4): This refers to killing the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī] and stabbing al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī. And most certainly you will behave insolently with great insolence: This refers to killing al-Ḥusayn. *So when the promise for the first of the two came:*[2] That is, when assistance for al-Ḥusayn comes; We will send over you Our servants, of mighty prowess so they will go to and fro among the houses: These are people sent by God before the rising of the Qāʾim. They will take vengeance for all blood from Muḥammad's family [that was shed unjustly]. This is a promise to be accomplished.[3]

Author's comment: There are other narrations with the same meaning. They intend to match the events which will take place in this nation with those which happened to the Israelites, confirming what is mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) from the Prophet that "this nation will commit what the Israelites committed, shoe for shoe and fletching for fletching,[4] to the extent that if they [the Israelites] entered a lizard's hole, so will they [the Muslims]." These narrations, however, do not serve to interpret the verses. Evidence to this is their discrepancy in what is being matched with the verses.

As for the original story behind these noble verses, there is astonishing discrepancy between the narrations, making it impossible to rely on

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Fāṭimah.

2 The change of the verse's verbs to present or future tense is based on an alternative translation corresponding to future events. (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Ibn Qūlawayh, via his chain of narration, on the authority of Ṣāliḥ b. Sahl.

4 That is, they will follow exactly the same path just like the equivalence of two mates of a pair and the sameness of feathers on an arrow. These are Arabic expressions used to show equality and sameness. (Trans.)

them. That is why we have eschewed citing them here. Whoever desires can refer to the Sunni and Shia hadith collections. Many important calamities—more than two—beset the Israelites since they gained independence, dominion and sovereignty according to historical records. These verses could apply to two of them. However, it is almost certain to the scholars [of hadith and history] that one of the two punishments talked about in the verse refers to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, who was the kings of Babylon approximately six centuries BC.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful and influential king and one of the tyrants of his time. He used to support the Israelites, but they disobeyed and rebelled against him. Thus he advanced on them with armies that they could not resist, besieged their cities and conquered them by force. He ruined the cities and destroyed the Farthest Mosque [that is, the Temple], burned the Torah and the scriptures of the prophets, and wiped people out through genocide. No one remained of them except for a tiny minority of women, children and weak men, whom he took prisoner and drove with him to Babylon. They stayed there with no one to defend or protect them throughout Nebuchadnezzar's lifetime, until Cyrus, one of the great Persian kings, attacked Babylon, conquered it, and showed lenience toward the Israelite prisoners. He allowed them to return to the Holy Land and helped them rebuild the Temple—the Farthest Mosque—and renovate the buildings. He allowed Ezra (ʿIzrā), one of their priests, to rewrite the Torah for them. That was four hundred and fifty-some years BC.

What is apparent from Jewish history is that the one sent first to destroy Bayt al-Maqdis was Nebuchadnezzar. It remained ruined for seventy years. The one sent the second time was the Roman emperor Vespasian, who sent his vizier Titus [to Jerusalem].[1] He destroyed the House and subjugated the people roughly a century BC.

It would not be surprising if the two events are what the verses are talking about, because the other events did not exterminate a large number of them or take away their dominion or independence all at once. However the Nebuchadnezzar disaster entirely removed them and abolished their sovereignty until the time of Cyrus. They were then repatriated for a time until the Romans defeated them and took away their power and might. The Jews remained in that state until the appearance of Islam.

The only thing which makes this unlikely is that the verses suggest

1 Titus was the son of Vespasian. (Trans.)

that the same people were sent to [attack] the Israelites both the first and the second time, as we discussed above in the exposition of the verses. "Then We gave you back the turn to prevail against them": This suggests that the Israelites prevailed against the same people who were originally sent against them. *"So when the second promise came that they may bring you to grief"*: This suggests that the plural pronoun ["they"] refers to "Our servants" who were mentioned above [that is, the same group of attackers].

However this is just an impression of the verse, not a clear indication, for it could be that the return victory (*karrah*) refers to a group other than the Israelites who prevailed against their enemies, which also benefited the Israelites. It is also possible that the plural pronoun ["they" in 17:7] refers to what is indicated by the context [not to "Our servants, of mighty prowess" in 17:5], and the context does not necessarily indicate that those sent the second time were the same as those sent the first time.

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Verses 9-22

The previous group of verses stated how the divine custom guides man to the path of truth and the religion of monotheism, which brings about the happiness of both worlds to whoever answers the true call, and the punishment of both worlds for whoever disbelieves in the truth and disobeys the commandment [of God]. Reference to the revelation of the Torah and what happened thereafter to the Israelites was an example of a specific application of this general rule.

This set of verses states how the aforementioned custom applies to this nation just as it applied to Moses' nation. The verses conclude the need to avoid attributing partners [to God] and the need to adhere to the path of monotheism as they will say: *Do not associate with God any other god, lest you sit down despised, neglected* (17:22).

Commentary

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِى لِلَّتِى هِىَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْراً كَبِيراً ﴿٩﴾

(17:9) *Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright* (aqwam) *and gives good news to the believers who do good* (al-ṣāliḥāt) *that they shall have a great reward.*

That is, it guides to the religion that is the most upright, as He says: *Say: Surely, (as for) me, my Lord has guided me to the right path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Abraham the upright one* (6:171).

Aqwam is a superlative derived from *qiyām*, meaning the standing position as opposed to the sitting position (*quʿūd*). It is the most balanced state and posture of the body which gives the person control to do anything that he wants, unlike other positions like sitting or lying on the back or faced down. Standing up is used metaphorically to talk about having a good command and control over the affairs without any weakness or failure, and directing the affairs toward one's objective. "He stood to such and such a matter" (*qāma bi-amri kadhā*) means that he took

charge of that matter. "He stood over such and such a matter" (*qām ʿalā amr kadhā*) mean that he watched, guarded and looked after that matter as appropriate. God has described this upright religion with the quality of standing (*qiyām*) in the verses: *Then set your face upright for religion in the right state–the nature made by God in which He has made men; there is no altering of God's creation; that is the upright religion* (al-dīn al-qayyim) (30:30); *Then turn thy face straight to the upright religion* (30:43).

This is based on the fact that this religion embraces the good of both worlds for the people, and serves to improve their condition in this life and afterlife. This is because it conforms to the primary nature (*fiṭrah*)[1] of mankind and the creation and means that God has given them accordingly so that they may achieve the goal that has been planned for them and the felicity that has been prepared for them.

Based on the [general discussion] above, if "the most upright" (in "to that which is most upright") is relative to the other schools and ideologies. This implies that they have some share of uprightness—in the sense that they are living customs that people have adopted to benefit them in some aspects of their lives. Yet, even though they may benefit them in some aspects of life, they harm them in others. Even if they secure a share of what they desire, they make them lose a great share of what is good for them. It is only Islam that looks after their life and everything that matters to them in this world and the hereafter without missing anything. Thus, the upright (*ḥanīfiyyah*) religion takes better care of human life than any other alternative.

However, given the previous set of verses, "the most upright" is apparently relative to the previous religions like those of Noah, Moses and Jesus, because the previous verses talked about the Torah which was made a guidance for the Israelites. This upright religion [of Islam] is more complete than the previous religions that were established by the scriptures of the earlier prophets. It contains divine teachings to the highest degree that human capacity can bear and laws for all individual and societal activities of mankind without exception. He says: *And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it* (5:48). Thus, what the Qur'an guides toward is more upright than what other Books guide toward.

…and gives good news to the believers who do good* (al-ṣāliḥāt) *that

1 Or, innate disposition. (Ed.)

they shall have a great reward: *Al-ṣāliḥāt* is an adjective for an implied noun that is omitted for the sake of brevity. What is implied is: "to the believers who do good [deeds]." The verse assigns a right for the believers who believe and do good deeds over God, as it is called a "reward." This is confirmed by the verse: *(As for) those who believe and do good, they shall surely have a reward never to be cut off* (41:8). There is nothing wrong with God owing them something if He has taken it on Himself. It is like: *Then We deliver Our messengers and those who believe–even so (now), it is binding on Us (that) We deliver the believers* (10:103).

The verse is concerned with explaining the promise that will be kept just as the next verse is concerned with the threat that will be followed through—that is, punishment for whoever disbelieves in the hereafter. As for whoever believes but does not do good [deeds], he is not one of those who have a definite right over God and whom God will certainly reward. Rather, his case hinges on repentance or intercession, so that he may catch up with the company of pious believers. He says: *And others have confessed their faults, they have mingled a good deed and an evil one; maybe God will turn to them (mercifully)* (9:102); *And others are made to await God's command, whether He chastise them or whether He turn to them (mercifully)* (9:106). True, they have a firm footing in the truth by virtue of their faith, as He says: *and give good news to those who believe that theirs is a footing of firmness with their Lord* (10:2); *and God confirms those who believe with the sure word in this world's life and in the hereafter* (14:27).

وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَاباً أَلِيماً ﴿١٠﴾

(17:10) ***And that (as for) those who do not believe in the hereafter, We have prepared*** **(aʿtadnā, from iʿtād)** ***for them a painful chastisement.***

Iʿtād means preparation *(iʿdād)* and furnishing (*tahyiʾah*). It comes from *ʿatād*, which according to al-Rāghib means saving something up before it is needed; it is synonymous with *iʿdād* (preparation). The apparent context of the verses suggests that this verse is added by conjunction to "they shall have" in the previous verse. That is: "And gives good news to the believers that those who do not believe…" This is good news for the believers because it is divine retribution against their enemies in religion.

Their view is specifically characterized by their lack of belief in the hereafter, even though it is possible that they also disbelieve in other

matters such as monotheism and prophethood. This is because this entire discourse revolves around the consequence of the upright religion. There is no place for religion and no benefit in it if one denies the hereafter, even if the person admits the Oneness of the Lord and other facts. That is why He considers forgetting the Day of Reckoning to be the root of every error as per the verse: *(as for) those who go astray from the path of God, they shall surely have a severe punishment because they forgot the day of reckoning* (38:26).

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وَيَدْعُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ ۖ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا ﴿١١﴾

(17:11) ***And man prays for evil*** **(bi al-sharr)** ***as he ought to pray*** **(duʿāʾahu)** ***for good*** **(bi al-khayr)*****, and man is ever hasty.***

Based on the context, *duʿāʾ* here is any request or pursuit (*ṭalab*), whether worded as a prayer such as: "O, God, provide me with wealth and children," or without verbal prayer but through seeking and striving. All of these are forms of prayer and request from God, whether a person is aware of it and believes in it or not, because there is in reality no giver or depriver apart from God. He says: *All those who are in the heavens and the earth ask of Him* (55:29); *And He gives you of all that you ask Him* (14:34).

Thus *duʿāʾ* means any pursuit (*ṭalab*). Then, letter *bāʾ* in *bi al-sharr* and *bi al-khayr* serves to connect the nouns to the verbs. That is: Man prays and asks for evil the same way as he prays for, asks for and seeks good.

Thus, describing the human being as hasty means that when he wants something, he does not take the time to pause and think about its benefit and harm in order to properly verify the goodness of what he wants and thus pursue and strive toward it. Instead, he is hasty in pursuing it as soon as he thinks of it and desires it while it could be either evil and harmful to him or good and beneficial.

This and the following verses involve a rebuke and criticism consequent to the previous talk of the divine favor of guiding to that which is most upright. It is effectively saying: Verily We have revealed a Book which guides to a religion which is most upright, driving those who adopt it toward happiness and heaven, steering them to a great reward and guiding them to all good. However, the human being, in his continuous haste, does not discriminate between good and evil, but pursues anything that occurs to him and asks for anything that springs to his mind. He desires things without differentiating between good and evil or truth and falsehood. So

he comes to evil the same way that he comes to good, and rushes toward falsehood just as he rushes toward the truth.

But he should not be hasty and pursue whatever he desires and lusts for. He does not have the right to do whatever he is capable of doing and commit whatever God has put at his disposal and has enabled him with. He cannot do so on the grounds that it is a divine facilitation and that had He wished otherwise He would have prevented me. See how these two divine signs—the night and the day [as discussed in verse 12]—are not of the same kind. Rather, the sign of the night is faded and obscured; it is when movements are stilled and eyes are calmed. But the sign of the day is manifest; it is when faculties are alert, people seek the bounty of their Lord, and thereby they know the numbering of the years and the reckoning.

Similarly good and bad deeds are both existent entities at man's disposal by God's leave, under the power that God has invested him with. However, this does not prove that it is permissible for man to do both good and evil, or to be hasty, pursue anything that occurs to him, and thus come to evil just as he comes to good and commit disobedience just as he commits obedience. On the contrary, he must treat an evil deed as something that is faded and obscured [like the sign of the night] and thereby should not commit it. He must treat good deed as a manifest sign, and should perform it to seek the bounty of His Lord which comprises of happiness and noble provision in the hereafter. Indeed a person's action is his omen and fate that directs him to his happiness or wretchedness,[1] and is inseparable from him. Any good or evil that he does will not leave him for anyone else and will not point to anyone other than himself.

This is the meaning of the verse in the context. It shows the following:

Firstly: This verse and the following ones are threaded to rebuke and criticize. This is what connects these verses with what preceded them: *Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright* (17:9), as we just discussed above. He is criticizing man for his propensity to hastiness, which causes him to not appreciate the blessing of divine guidance as he should, and to not discriminate between the religion which is most upright and others. He thus prays for and seeks evil the same way that he prays for and seeks good, and heads for misery the same way that he heads for happiness.

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1 Much like the night and the day that are signs, and this is a connection between verses 12 and 13. (Trans.)

Secondly: What is meant by man in these verses is the genus [that is, all human beings], not specific groups such as the unbelievers and the polytheists as some exegetes have suggested. Likewise, it has been said that *duʿāʾ* (prayer, supplication) means any kind of pursuit, not the technical sense of the term. Furthermore, good and bad are what cause one's real happiness or wretchedness in life, not absolutely everything that benefits or harms. Therefore, it does not include a person's supplication for the success and prosperity of one whom he likes, or for the failure and loss of one whom he dislikes. Finally, haste means man's love for the immediate realization of what he desires. It is not about one's insistence and stubbornness in asking for punishment and calamity [as an act of challenging and disparaging the warnings of the prophets].

The exegetes disagree remarkably over the vocabulary of the verse and have disordered statements explaining how this verse and the ones that follow are connected to those preceding them. We have eschewed citing them and plunging into them because it is pointless to address them. Whoever wishes can refer to their books.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَتَيْنِ ۖ فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ
مُبْصِرَةً لِتَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ ۚ
وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾

(17:12) ***And We have made the night and the day two signs, then We have made the sign–the night* (ayat al-layl)*–to pass away and We have made the sign–the day* (ayat al-nahār)*–manifest* (mubṣiratan)*, so that you may seek grace from your Lord, and that you might know the numbering of years and the reckoning; and We have explained everything with distinctness.***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Mubṣirah* means shining, illuminating and glowing. According to Abū ʿAmr, the day is called *mubṣirah* in the sense that daylight enables one to see (*baṣara yubṣiru*). It is similar to the expressions "a sleeping night" (*layl nāʾim*) and "a concealing secret" (*sirr kātim*) [meaning "a night when one sleeps" and "a secret that one conceals"]. Al-Kisāʾī says: The Arabs say: "The day gave sight" (*abṣar al-nahār*) when it becomes bright.

Night and day are light and darkness that follow each other over the earth as it faces the sun upon sunrise and is hidden from it at sunset. Just like all other things in existence, their very reality and their [various] states are signs of God that suffice to show that He alone is the Lord.

Hence, their being made two signs is their being created this way. It is not that they were first created without being signs and then they were made signs that point to the Creator. All things, in their very essence and being, are His signs that point to their Creator, not because of any accidental or secondary attribute.

This also clarifies that *āyat al-layl* and *āyat al-nahār* mean the very night and day. In other words, the ascription [of *layl* and *nahār* to *āyat*] is explanatory, not possessive. Making the night pass away refers to its darkness, which makes it hidden from the eyes as opposed to the day.[1]

Some exegetes have said that the sign of the night means the moon and its effacement is the dark spots on it; while the sign of the day is the sun and its being made manifest is the lack of any darkness or blackness on its disc . This is not a sound interpretation because the verse is talking about two signs [in total], not two signs of two signs. Furthermore, what can be inferred from "so that you may seek grace from your Lord…" follows consequentially from the light of the day versus the darkness of the night, not from the dark spots on the face of the moon versus the sun's disc being free of that.

Similarly, others have claimed that the sign of the night means its darkness, the sign of the day means daylight, and the effacement of the sign of the night means the effacement of its darkness by the light of day. This also applies to daylight which is effaced by the night's darkness, but it has not been mentioned as it is understood.

It should be clear that this is not a valid interpretation based on what we said above: The point of the verse is to show that there is a difference between the two signs, although they both serve as signs and indications. The above interpretation, however, nullifies the distinction.

…so that you may seek grace from your Lord …: This is consequential to "and We have made the sign–the day–manifest." That is: We made it

1 This complies with the above translation. So the verse is saying: We have created these two signs, and We have effaced the first sign—which is called the night—and We have manifested the second sign—which is called the day. (Trans.)

illuminating so that you can pursue your provision from your Lord during it, because provision is His grace and bounty.

Some say that the implied meaning is: So that you can rest at night and seek bounty from your Lord by day, where the first part (so that you can rest at night) is omitted because of what is said elsewhere [in the Qur'an].[1] The problem is that the verse is threaded to explain the results of only one of the two signs, even though they are both signs. But the presumably omitted part in this interpretation contradicts this idea.

…and that you might know the numbering of years and the reckoning;…: That is: The effacement of the night and the illumination of the day enable you to know the numbering of the years by setting some day as the initial point and counting from then onwards. This way you may keep track of the times and terms [of your affairs]. The context of the verse suggests that knowledge of years and the reckoning is consequential to the day being made manifest, just as seeking God's grace was consequential to it. That is because we do not realize the non-existence or lack of something except by means of existence. Darkness is a lack of light; were it not for light we would neither realize light nor darkness. We apparently measure time based on both the night and the day, and we distinguish each based on the other. Yet, the existential (*wujūdī*) one—that is, the day—is what our perception grasps first, and then we realize the non-existential (*ʿadamī*) one—that is, the night—by a kind of comparison. The same applies to any existential reality in relation to a non-existential one in comparison to it.

Al-Rāzī says in his exegesis [summarized]:

> It is most plausible to say that the sign of the night is the moon, and its effacement is what befalls it in terms of growing and shrinking night by night from wane to wane. This is a great sign due to its enormous effects on oceans, deserts and the people's health.

This implicates, as he has indicated, that the subsequent inferences (so that you may seek grace from your Lord, and that you might know the numbering of years and the reckoning) are a result of both making the sign of the night to pass away and making the sign of the day manifest. The meaning would then be: We made it so that you can seek your provisions during sunlight and at different moon states, and know thereby the numbering of years and the reckoning because the sun is what separates

1 See verse 10:67. (Trans.)

day from night, the moon with its various forms marks the lunar months, and the months mark the years. Thus letter *lām* (lit. "so that") in both phrases—*li tabtaghū* (so that you may seek) and *li taʿlamū* (so that you may know)—is dependent on both verbs *maḥawnā* (We have made…to pass away) and *jaʿalnā* (We made).

The problem with this is that the context of the verse does not fit the purpose mentioned in it being consequential to both signs—that is, the sign that is made passing (the night) and the one that is made staying (the day). You should know [based on our exposition of the previous verses] that the verses are on a thread of rebuke and criticism. The position of this verse (*And We have made the night and the day two signs*) in this context is that it is an answer to a potential justification that mankind may give to justify pursuing evil as they pursues good.

The line of meaning can be summarized as such: Because of man's haste, he does not pay attention to the Book that God has revealed and the most upright religion that He has guided him toward. Instead, he hurtles into evil and pursues it as he should pursue good, without pausing in his action and pondering if it is correct or corrupt. Instead he hurtles right away toward whatever he desires and is capable of pursuing. In doing so he relies on his natural freedom to act and is effectively arguing that God has enabled him to do this act and has not stopped him from it; as God has quoted the polytheists saying: *If God had pleased, we would not have served anything besides God, (neither) we nor our fathers* (16:35).

This is answered in a context of rebuke and criticism by saying that the mere ability to do an act does not necessarily mean that it is permissible to do it. The ability to do either good or evil does not mean that it is permissible to hurtle into evil as one would seek good. See how night and day are two of God's signs in which man lives. God has made one of these signs—the night—to pass away and has decreed stillness and rest for it; but He has made the other sign—the day—manifest and conducive to seeing, when people can seek their sustenance, and by which people can keep track of the number of years and the reckoning.

The day and the night are both signs of God, but this does not necessarily mean that both are equally subject to motion and alternation. Rather, motion and alternation exclusively belong to the day. Likewise, good and evil deeds are common in the sense that they both occur by God's leave, and that God has enabled mankind to commit both. Nonetheless, this does not necessitate that it is equally permissible to commit either of the

two. Rather, the permissibility of performing or committing is exclusive to doing good, not doing evil. Man is thus not entitled to tread whatever path occurs to him or do whatever he desires or fancies, relying on the natural freedom and divine enablement as an excuse.

The above also shows the invalidity of what some have said, that the verse is threaded as an argument for monotheism, because night and day, the changes that occur to them, and the blessings that emanate from them are among the clearest signs of Divine Unity.

The problem with this claim is that even though they indicate Divine Unity, this is not necessarily the purpose of stating them here. They [that is, day and night and their changes and benefits] are not always intended to indicate this [Divine Unity] regardless of their context.

and We have explained everything with distinctness: This suggests that things are distinct from one another, and that nothing is left ambiguous or unexplained in creation.

وَكُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَائِرَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ ۖ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنْشُورًا ﴿١٣﴾

(17:13) ***And We have made every man's bird of omen* (ṭā'irahu)** ***to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open.***

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Ṭā'ir* here means a person's actions. It is likened to a bird that either lands and appears (*yasnaḥu*), foretelling the coming of blessings and good fortune, or a bird that flies away and disappears (*yabraḥu*), foreshadowing the coming of danger or calamity. *Al-sāniḥ* is what has its right facing your left, while *al-bāriḥ* is what has its left facing your right. The origin of this [naming and designation] was that in case of a *sāniḥ* an archer could shoot [it easily], but in case of a *bāriḥ* he could not. Abū Zayd says: Everything that moves—birds, gazelles, and so on— was considered a *ṭā'ir* (that is, omen) for them [that is, pre-Islamic Arabs].

Al-Kashshāf says:

> They used to regard a bird (*ṭayr*) as an omen and call it *zajr* (repulsion). This naming was because when they traveled and a bird came by, they used to repel it and fend it away. If a *sāniḥ* bird

passed them—that is, one that flies from left to right—then they augured well from it. On the other hand, if a bāriḥ bird passed them—that is, one that passes from right to left—they would augur ill. That is why it (seeing an [evil] omen) is called *taṭayyur* (lit. taking on a bird).

Al-Mufradāt says:

Taṭayyara and *iṭṭayara* originally referred to seeing an omen through birds, but then became used for any means of making good or bad omens. They said: *Surely we augur evil from you* (innā taṭayyarnā bikum; 36:18). That is why it is said [in hadith and supplication to God]: "There is no evil fortune (*ṭayr*) except for Yours."

when evil afflicted them, they attributed it to the ill-luck (yaṭṭayarū) *of Moses and those with him* (7:131): That is, they view him as a bad omen. *Surely their evil fortune* (ṭāʾiruhum) *is only from God* (7:131): That is, their misfortune is what God has prepared for them because of their bad deeds. *They said: We have met with ill luck* (iṭṭayyarnā) *on account of you and on account of those with you. He said: The cause of your evil fortune* (ṭāʾirukum) *is with God…* (27:47)

And We have made every man's bird of omen (ṭāʾirahu) *to cling to his neck* (17:13). One's "bird of omen" is his actions, whether good or evil, which "flies" (*ṭāra*; that is, emanates) from him. *Taṭāyarū* is said when [people] hasten, or when they disperse.

In summary, the preceding and succeeding verses—especially verse 15 (*Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright…*)—show that *ṭāʾir* means what indicates good or bad fortune. It reveals a good or bad outcome. Every person has something linked to his ultimate fate that would indicate whether it will be good or bad. Making the *ṭāʾir* cling to a person means making one's action inseperable from him. They are made to cling to the neck because it is a body part which a person cannot be separated from, and which cannot be separated from a person, unlike limbs such as arms or legs. It is the part of the body that links the head to the chest, and whatever is hung on it—such as a necklace, collar or fetter— is the first thing that one sees when he meets the person.

Therefore, what is meant by this sentence (*And We have made every man's bird of omen to cling to his neck*) is: That which brings about every person's ultimate fate—happiness or misery—is with him, not separating

from him by a decree from God. God is the One Who has made it cling to him. Further, this [cause of one's fate which is inseparable from the person] is the person's actions, as He says: *And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for–and that his striving shall soon be seen–then shall he be rewarded for it with the fullest reward* (53:39-41).

Hence, the *ṭāʾir* (augury, bird of omen or fate) that God has made to cling to a person's neck is his actions. "Making it cling" means that God has decreed that every action depends on its actor in subsistence. Its good, bad, beneficial or harmful consequences do not leave him for anyone else, but they return to him. God's definitive decree is that good fate is a result of faith and God-fearing, and bad fate is a result of disbelief and disobedience, as deduced from the verses: *And surely Hell is the promised place of them all… Surely those who are God-fearing shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains* (15:43-45).

What this necessitates is that one's actions that determine his end are attached to him. This is a binding attachment that can never be severed, and the actions determine the person's fate precisely and without any error. This is because it has been decreed that every action belongs to its doer, the doer has nothing else but it, the fate of obedience is Paradise, and the fate of disobedience is hell.

Based on the above, the verse is saying that one's ultimate happiness or misery hinges only upon the good or bad deeds that he earns through choice. This is exactly the opposite of what some exegetes have falsely claimed: that the verse is denying the effects of deeds on happiness or wretchedness, for it is asserting that one's happiness or wretchedness is predestined, irrespective of one's action and obedience.

…and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open: This book is described by what follows: *Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day* (17:14). It shows the following points:

i) The book which is brought forth to him is his own book, not anyone else's.

ii) This, the book, contains the reality of his deeds which he has done in this world without missing anything, as per the verse: *And they will say: Ah! woe to us! what a book is this! it does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all)* (18:49).

iii) The realities of one's deeds that are enumerated in his book will be manifest and their good or bad results will be evident, be that happiness

or wretchedness. They will be so patent that they cannot be cover by anything or redeemed by any excuse. He says: *Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp.* (50:22).

On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil (3:30): Based on this verse, that book contains the very reality of deeds, not written letters as is the case of books in this world. They are the very deeds which God makes one look at with his own eyes, and there is no proof like seeing with one's own eyes.

That is why apparently omen (*ṭāʾir*) and book in the verse refer to the same thing: the deeds a person does. However, God makes a distinction between book and omen (*ṭāʾir*) by saying, "We will bring forth to him a book" instead of saying, "We will bring it forth to him as a book." This is to avoid giving the impression that one's deeds become his book only on the Day of Resurrection but they were an omen and not a book prior to that. It is also to avoid giving the impression that one's omen is hidden, concealed and under cover prior to the Day of Resurrection, because this would contradict its "clinging to one's neck."

In short, "We will bring forth to him" suggests that the book of the reality of deeds is hidden from human perception and veiled behind a veil of heedlessness. God only brings it forth to the person on the Day of Resurrection, making him look at all its details. That is what is meant by: *he will find it wide open*.

This indicates that this [book] is something prepared for him, not something overlooked. This confirms His words: *And We have made every man's bird of omen to cling to his neck*. Overall, what is being said is that the consequence of one's action will inevitably reach him, either sooner, as it clings to him without separation; or later, as it is recorded as a book which will appear to him and which he will find wide open.

اقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا ﴿١٤﴾

(17:14) *Read your book; your own self* (bi-nafsika) *is sufficient* (kafā) *as a reckoner against you this day.*

That is: He will be told, *"Read your book…"* [1]

1 In other words, "He will be told" is omitted as it is implied. (Trans.)

Kafā bi-nafsika (your own self is sufficient): The Letter *bā'* is an extra letter added for emphasis. The origin of the formulation is *kafat nafsuka* (your own self suffices), except that the verb is used in the masculine form [*kafā*, instead of the feminine *kafat*] because the subject [*nafs*] is only metaphorically feminine, whereby it can take either a masculine or feminine verb. It has also been said that it [the whole phrase *kafā bi-nafsika*] serves as a verbal noun that means *iktafi* (content yourself). If so, then the *bā'* would not be extra. There may also be other explanations for it.

The verse shows that the book's proof is incontrovertible such that its reader will be in no doubt, even if he is the offender himself. How can there be any doubt when the very deeds are seen, and they [the very deeds] compose one's retribution? He says: *O you who disbelieve! do not urge excuses today; you shall be rewarded only according to what you did* (66:7).

The connection between these two verses (17:13-14) can be understood from our explanation about the connection between verse 17:11 and its preceding verses. In brief, since these verses involve a context of rebuke and criticism, they mean: God revealed the Qur'an and made it a guide to the most upright religion, according to His divine custom of guiding people to monotheism and servitude, and His custom of giving salvation to whoever follows guidance and giving damnation to whoever goes astray. However, man does not distinguish good from evil and does not discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful. Instead, he hurries toward whatever he desires, and thus he pursues evil just as he pursues good.

The case is that deeds, whether good or bad, are bound to their doer, and they never leave him. They are also recorded against him in a book which will be brought forth to him on the Day of Resurrection and spread open in front of him, and he will be reckoned according to it. If that is so, then mankind must not launch straight into whatever they lust. They should not hasten to commit anything that they desire, but they should pause over the matters and ponder to discriminate between them and distinguish their good from their evil, so that they may take up the good and avoid the evil.

مَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۚ وَلَا تَزِرُ
وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

(17:15) ***Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray: nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden*** **(wizr)** ***of another, and We have not been chastisers until We raise a messenger.***

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Wizr* means burden, like the *wazr* (heavy rocks) of mountains. Sin is referred to as *wizr* as well as *thiql* (weight). He says:
> *That they may bear their burdens* (awzārahum) *entirely…* (16:25).
> *And most certainly they shall carry their own burdens* (athqālahum), *and other burdens with their own burdens…* (29:13).
> *Nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another* (17:15): That is, one cannot bear the burden of another such that he [the other] is stripped of his load.

The verse is a conclusion of verse 17:13 (*And We have made every man's bird of omen to cling to…*). The third sentence (*nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another*) emphasizes the second sentence (*and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray*).

The implied meaning is: Given that one's deeds—whether good or bad—cling to their doer without separating from him, and are recorded against him until he sees them at the time of reckoning, then it follows that whoever goes aright, goes aright for himself; its benefit will accrue to himself and no one else. Similarly, whoever strays from the path only strays to the detriment of himself; it will only harm himself, without leaving him and attaching to anyone else. No soul shall carry another soul's burden. It is not like what some followers of error believe, that if they go astray then the burden of their error will be upon their leaders who led them astray. For example, those who emulated their fathers and ancestors mistakenly believed that they will not be responsible for their sins and burdens, but their fathers and ancestors will.

True, the leaders of error bear loads equivalent to those of [all] their followers, and whoever establishes an evil custom will bear the burdens of whoever acts upon it. Whoever says, "Follow us so that we can bear your sins," will certainly bear as much sins as the followers'. However, all of this is the burden of their leadership (*imāmah*) and their innovation of [an evil] custom. It is not that these leaders will literally take away the very burden of the sinner such that the deed is separated from the doer and is transferred to the leader. If it were the exact same burden, then that

would entail that two people would be punished for a single act.

and We have not been chastisers until We raise a messenger: Based on the context of this verse and the subsequent verses—and even the previous verses—what is meant by chastisement here is exterminatory punishment in this world. This is supported by how the verse's negation is expressed: It does not merely say, "We do not punish" or "We will not punish," but it says, "We have not been chastisers until We raise a messenger." The past continuous tense of the verb indicates that God's custom with past nations that were destroyed was not to punish them until He had sent a messenger to them to warn them of God's punishment.

This is also supported by the fact that He refers to this envoy as a messenger (*rasūl*) as opposed to a prophet (*nabī*). He does not say: "… until We raise a prophet." In our discussion about the difference between a messenger and a prophet in our discussion on prophethood in volume 2 [volume 3 of the English translation], we stated that messengership is a special divine position which is followed by decisive judgment upon the nation to be either exterminated by punishment or to enjoy life until an appointed time. He says: *And every nation had a messenger; so when their messenger came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly* (10:47); Their messengers said: *Is there doubt about God, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? He invites you to forgive you your faults and to respite you till an appointed term* (14:10).

Hence, the use of the word "messenger" shows that what is being negated is punishment in this world, not punishment in the hereafter or punishment in an absolute and unconditional sense.

The clause, *nor do We chastise until We raise a messenger* is like a refutation of a potential misinterpretation of the previous verses, which talked about the consequence of deeds catching up with their doers, with great reward for good-doers and painful punishment for evildoers. The misinterpretation would be to assume that the consequences of bad deeds, including worldly and otherworldly punishment, will follow these deeds and encompass their doers unrestrictedly and unconditionally.

But here it says that God, out of His vast mercy and complete care, does not inflict exterminatory punishment in this world until He has sent a messenger to warn the sinners. He has the right to punish them right away, but through His mercy and compassion He gives plenty of warning and establishes proof after proof, and only then does He send punishment.

Thus, *"and We have not been chastisers until We raise a messenger"*

negates the occurrence of punishment, not its justification.

Therefore, as you can see, the verse is not about establishing the intellect's decree that it is wrong to punish someone without sending them clear guidance. Instead, it reveals what the divine care necessitates: that a group is not exterminated by punishment unless a messenger has been sent to them to emphasize His proof against them and to provide them with evidence after evidence.

As for prophethood [*nubuwwah*, as opposed to messengership, *risālah*], it is a role by which duties are communicated and religious laws are clarified. It determines one's reward or punishment in the hereafter, and whether one qualifies for God's punishment or forgiveness with regards to matters whose truth or falsehood can only be identified through prophethood, such as practical duties (*furūᶜ*). As for the fundamentals of religion and beliefs, that the intellect can understand independently—such as God's unity, prophethood and resurrection—the consequences of their acceptance or rejection are established rationally and independent of prophethood or messengership.

Overall, practical duties included in the prophetic call hinge upon the principles of the religion which reason can understand independently. The rejection of these principles despite the establishment of incontrovertible rational proof for them would be sufficient for the occurrence of divine punishment, without depending on the message of a prophet or messenger. This is because the very validity of a prophet's or messenger's message depends on these rational proofs; if they were to depend in turn on prophethood, that would be a vicious circle.

Meanwhile, accountability in the hereafter for practical duties depends on the prophetic message, as the proof for them is not established by the rule of the intellect alone. We discussed this in detail in the sections on prophethood in volume 2 [volume 3 of the English translation], under Noah's story in volume 10 [volume 20 of the English translation], and elsewhere [in this work].

Nevertheless, exterminatory punishment in this world is meted out only after God sends a messenger. This is due to God's care, not due to any rational necessity. There is no rational argument to show that the occurrence of this type of punishment is impossible before a messenger is sent, as you saw above.

Exegetes have long debates over this verse. We have eschewed addressing them because most of them are beyond the scope of exegetical

discussions. What we have posited may not conform to what they have; however, the truth is worthier of being followed.

وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا ﴿١٦﴾

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(17:16) ***And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the affluent ones*** **(mutrafīhā, from turfah),** ***so they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction*** **(dammārnāhā tadmīran).**

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Turfah* is abundance of [material] bounty. It is said: *utrifa fulānun fa-huwa mutraf* (someone is provided with opulent means and so he is living in luxury)… *"We send Our commandment to the affluent ones"* (17:16) refers to: *And as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and provides him with bounty…* (89:15).

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Turfah* means bounty. Ibn ʿArafah says: A *mutraf* is someone left to do what he pleases, without being stopped. *Tadmīr* means annihilation, and *damār* means ruin.

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And when We wish to destroy a town…: That is: When the time for their ruin approaches. It is like when one says, "When the sick person wants to die" or "When the sky wants to rain," meaning "When he is about to die" and "When it is about to rain." Obviously wanting death and wanting to rain are not meant literally. The Qur'an says: *Then they found in it a wall which wanted to fall* (yurīdu an yanqaḍḍa) (18:77) [that is, it was on the verge of falling].

It could also be that "We wish" refers to God's effective will (*al-irādat al-fiʿliyyah*), the reality of which is the cooperation and coming together of the necessary causes for a given result or event to happen. This is close to the first meaning, and it essentially means the occurrence of the causes of their destruction, which are their ingratitude for God's bounties and their defiant disobedience. He says: *If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe* (14:7); *Who committed inordinacy in the cities, so they made great mischief therein? Therefore your Lord let down upon them a portion of the chastisement. Most surely your Lord is watching* (89:11-14).

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…We send Our commandment to the affluent ones, so they transgress therein: We know from God's words that He never commands disobedience legislatively (*al-amr al-tashrīʿī*). He it is Who says: *Say: Surely God does not enjoin indecency* (7:28). As with existential command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), it is even clearer that He does not command disobedience qua disobedience, because that would make the occurrence of the action necessary. Such an act will no longer be attributable to the person's choice and hence it will no longer be "disobedience" because there is no disobedience without choice. He says: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is* (36:82).

One possibility is that the object of commandment (*in We send Our commandment*) is obedience. Then, commandment would have its literal sense, which is a legislative command, and it would be directed at them by the tongue of the messenger who communicates their Lord's commandment and warns them of His punishment if they disobey. It is the matter which is exclusive to the messenger as alluded to above [in verse 17:15]. Then, when they disobey and deviate from the command of their Lord, "the word proves true against them," meaning that they will be punished. That is, if they disobey, then they will be ruined and utterly destroyed.[1]

A second possibility is that the object of commandment is deviation and disobedience. In this case, what is meant by sending commandment is pouring bounties upon them abundantly and profusely as a means of giving respite and gradually leading them to deviation, until they [actually] deviate. At that point, "the word proves true against" them and punishment would descend on them.

These are two possible explanations for "*We send Our commandment to the affluent ones, so they transgress therein.*" However the first of the two is unlikely due to the following reasons:

Firstly: When we say: "I commanded him and he did so," or, "I commanded him and he disobeyed," the apparent meaning is that the object of the command is the same as the subsequent part of the sentence [that is, what the person did].

Secondly: The subsequent disobedience is attributed to all of the people in the town; that is why they are all destroyed. Therefore, there is no apparent reason for why the commandment [to obedience] should be only directed at the affluent ones among them.

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1 See verse 65:8 for evidence for this interpretation. (Trans.)

Al-Kashshāf says:

> "Commandment" is used metaphorically here, because literal commandment to transgression would be to tell them: "Transgress!" This cannot be the case, which means that it must be metaphorical. The metaphorical connection is that they used the bounties that God poured upon them abundantly as a means of sinning and pursuing their selfish desires; as if they were told to do so because of the bounties bestowed upon them. They were given these bounties so that they would be grateful, righteous, generous and able to do good; just as He had created them healthy, strong and capable of doing good or evil, and then commanded them to favor obedience over disobedience. But they favored transgression. Once they transgressed, "the word proved true against them"—that is, the word of punishment—and so He destroyed them.
>
> You may suggest: "Why do you not say that it means sending the commandment to them to obey but then they disobeyed?" I would reply: It is not permissible to omit something without some evidence to infer it, let alone omitting something while there is evidence to infer its opposite! The object of commandment is omitted because it can be inferred from "they transgressed" (*fasaqū*). This is a very common turn of phrase; for example one says: "I commanded him and he got up" or "I commanded him and he read." What is understood from these is that the object of commandment is to get up or to read. If you were implying something else, then you would be expecting your audience to have knowledge of the unseen!
>
> This inference, however, does not apply to when one says, "I commanded him and he disobeyed me" or "I commanded him but he did not to obey my command." This is because it talks about the disobedience of the speaker's command, and it does not make sense to command someone to disobey one's very command! Such command cannot be intended to begin with, let alone serving as evidence to the object of command. Rather, the object of command in these cases is different from what is apparently implied or intended [because of the subsequent evidence]. One who says this [that is, "I commanded him and he disobeyed me" or "I commanded him but he did not obey my command"] is

> essentially not intending any specific object of commandment. Instead, it is as if he is saying, "There was some command that I made but he did not obey," much like when one says, "So-and-so gives and restrains, and orders and forbids" without intending a specific object.[1]
>
> You might ask: "We know for certain that God does not enjoin indecencies, but He only commands good and rectitude. Is this not sufficient to infer that what is meant is that We commanded them to do good but they transgressed?"
>
> I would reply: This is not the case because the verse says *fa-fasaqū* ("so they transgressed"). If your suggested interpretation were correct, it would be as if you explicitly state something but then you claim to have implied the opposite. Thus interpreting the word metaphorically is the [correct] explanation.

This explanation is effective in showing why the object of command in this verse (*We send Our commandment to the affluent ones, so they transgress therein*) is apparently transgression (*fisq*). However, unlike what he has said, it does not show that the object of command is explicitly transgression, in a way that would leave no other possible meaning.[2] Why can the verse not be like our saying: "I commanded him but then he disobeyed me," where disobedience (*maʿṣiyah*), which is contrary to the command, is a contextual indicator that the object of command was obedience? After all, transgression (*fisq*) and disobedience (*maʿṣiyah*) are the same thing, because *fisq* is to divest oneself of servitude and obedience, which is equivalent to disobedience. In that case, the meaning of the verse would be: We send Our commandment to the affluent ones to obey, but they disobey and transgress against Our commandment. Or perhaps the verb *amarnā* (lit. "We commanded") is used in an intransitive sense, meaning: Our commandment was directed at the affluent ones among them, but they transgressed it.[3]

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1 What is meant by "So-and-so gives and restrains, and orders and forbids" is that so-and-so has absolute power to give or restrain whatever he wants, and he has full authority to order or forbid anything. (Trans.)

2 This is a difference between the initial and primary sense of the verse, called the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*), vs. a direct and definite sense of the text, called the explicit meaning (*taṣrīḥ, naṣṣ*). (Trans.)

3 It is intransitive in the sense that no object of commandment is intended.

The truth is that there is nothing wrong with both explanations, although the second one is more apparent. Some exegetes have provided the following explanation for why the commandment is specifically given to the affluent ones: They were the chiefs, masters and leaders who were followed by others, and what is decreed for the followers follows what is decreed for the leaders. This explanation, however, is not free from flaw.

Some have suggested that "We send Our commandment to the affluent ones" (*amarnā mutrafīhā*) is a description of "a town" (*qaryah*), as opposed to being the complement or apodosis of "when" (*idhā*). They have added that the apodosis[1] of *idhā*[2] is omitted because it is implied, as in the verse: *Until when* (idhā) *they come to it, and its doors shall be opened, and the keepers of it shall say to them* (39:73). It is omitted because it is understood from the verse.

Others say that some words are brought forward and others are put back [from their ordinary positions]. What is meant is: "When We command those of a town who are the affluent ones and they transgress therein, We want to destroy them." That is because it makes no sense to want destruction before the occurrence of its cause—that is, transgression. Like the previous one, this is a baseless explanation.

All of the above is based on the universally accepted recitation of *amarnā*, derived from *amr* meaning command. But it might also be derived from *amr* meaning to provide in abundance. That is: We provided the affluent ones there with abundant wealth and children but then they transgressed therein.

The term has also been recited as *āmarnā*, attributed to ᶜAlī, ᶜĀṣim, Ibn Kathīr, Nāfiᶜ and others. It means to provide with abundant wealth and children. It can also mean to impose a duty and prescribe an act.

It is also recited as *ammarnā*, derived from *taʾmīr* meaning to put someone in charge and command. This is attributed to ᶜAlī, al-Ḥasan, al-Bāqir, Ibn ᶜAbbās, Zayd b. ᶜAlī and others.

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِنْ بَعْدِ نُوحٍ ۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِ

(Trans.)

1 The clause expressing the consequence in a conditional sentence. (Ed.)

2 The implied meaning would be: When We wish to destroy a town where We sent Our commandment to the affluent ones, they transgress therein… (Trans.)

خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾

(17:17) ***And how many of the generations*** **(al-qurūn)** ***did We destroy after Noah! and your Lord is sufficient as Knowing and Seeing with regard to His servants' faults.***

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Qarn* means a people that live during the same time. The plural is *qurūn*. God says: *And certainly We did destroy generations* (al-qurūn) *before you* (10:13); *And how many of the generations* (al-qurūn) *did We destroy* (17:17).

The meaning of the verse is clear. There is in it reinforcement of what was said in the previous verse—that is, God's custom of destroying towns—through reference to previous generations destroyed.

The verse involves some hint that the custom of destroying was only legislated in human generations following Noah. This is indeed the case. As we said above—in the exegesis of verse 2:213 (*People were a single nation; so Allah raised prophets…*) in volume 2 [volume 3 of the English translation]—before the time of Noah the human society was on its pure primary nature (*fiṭrah*), but they deviated from one another after that.

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا ﴿١٨﴾

(17:18) ***Whoever desires this hasty [life]*** **(al-ʿājilah),** ***We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him the hell; he shall enter it*** **(yaṣlāhā, from ṣaly)** ***despised, driven away*** **(madḥūran, from daḥr).**

Al-ʿājilah is an adjective describing an implied noun which may be life (*al-ḥayāh*), based on being contrasted with the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*) in the following verse, because what is meant there is the afterlife (*al-ḥayāt al-ākhirah*). It has also been suggested that it means present bounties and immediate comforts (*al-niʿamt al-ʿājilah*).[1] Others have suggested present and immediate worldly possessions (*al-aʿrāḍ al-dunyawiyyat al-ʿājilah*).

1 Therefore the implied noun could be either life, bounty, or worldly possessions. (Trans.)

Al-Mufradāt says:

> The root meaning of *ṣaly* is used for lighting a fire… Al-Khalīl says that *ṣalā al-kāfir al-nār* means that "the unbeliever tastes the heat of the fire." God says: *They will endure* (yaṣlawnaḥā) *its heat, and evil is the resort* (58:8).
>
> It is claimed that *salā al-nār* means "he entered hell." *Aṣlāhā* means making another person enter it [that is, throwing someone in fire]. God says: *We will soon cast him* (nuṣlīhi) *into fire* (4:30).

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Daḥr* means to cast away. So *madḥūr* means one who has been sent, driven or cast away. *Allāhumma idḥar ᶜannā al-shayṭān* means: O, God, drive the devil away from us.

The previous verses described God's custom of punishing in this world after the apostolic mission. He states that He guides human nations to belief and good deeds, but if they turn to corruption [themselves] and corrupt others, then He sends them a messenger. Then, if they rebel and transgress, He punishes them by an exterminatory chastisement. That discussion is followed in this verse and the next two by explaining His custom of punishing or rewarding in the hereafter. He explains the condition for punishment in one verse, the condition for reward in another, and a summary as a general principle in the third.

Whoever desires this hasty [life]: What is meant is the hasty and immediate life; which is the life of [or in] this world. "Desiring" the life of this world means pursuing things that one's *nafs* (self, soul, ego) finds pleasurable and one's heart is attached to. Attachment to the hasty life and its pursuit would be a "desire" of this life is they are one's objective in and of themselves, not as a means for otherworldly happiness. Otherwise, that would be a desire of the hereafter because one can reach the hereafter only through the passage of this world. Thus a person is considered an aspirant of this world if he turns away from and forgets the hereafter, restricting his desire to this world. The verse's expression (*Whoever desires*) also confirms this notion because it indicates desire as a continuous quality.[1]

This is he who sees for himself nothing but this worldly material life and denies the afterlife. Such a view essentially annuls one's attestation to prophethood and monotheism, because belief in God and His messengers and subscribing to religion would be futile without belief in

1 This is because the verb "desires" is in present tense. (Trans.)

resurrection. He says: *Therefore turn aside from him who turns his back upon Our reminder and does not desire anything but this world's life. That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge; surely your Lord knows best him who goes astray from His path…* (53:29-30).

…We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire: That is: We do not hesitate to give him what he desires in this world, however not what [and/or how much] he wants, but what [and/or how much] We want. It is up to Us, not to him, and it is Our Will that will unfold, not his will. Moreover, We do not give to everyone who wants [the present life], but only to whomever We desire. We are not governed by the wills of individuals, but Our will governs them.

God's will at the level of action (*al-irādat al-fiʿliyyah*, effective will) means the coming together of the causes and means of the object of His will so that it may come to existence. The verse is saying that the aspirant of this world will be provided as much as the causes and factors that God has enacted in the universe allow. Thus, one attains what he wants and asks for by his tongue of existence [that is, by his very existential state and capacity], but only as much as its means enable him. *"And Allah encompasses them on every side"* [85:20].

God refers to this reality in another way in this verse: *And were it not that all people had been a single nation, We would certainly have assigned to those who disbelieve in the Beneficent (to make) of silver the roofs of their houses and the stairs by which they ascend. And the doors of their houses and the couches on which they recline, And (other) embellishments of gold; and all this is naught but provision of this world's life* (43:33-35). What is meant here [by "were it not that all people had been a single nation"] is: "Were it not that all people are a single nation that live under the same system of causes and means irrespective of being believers or unbelievers…" In other words, everyone is equal before the existential means in the universe: If the causes of wealth and richness are realized for anyone, then these causes will make that person wealthy and rich, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever; and if these causes are not realized then that will not happen. So the verse is saying that had it not been for this equality before Our system of causes and effects, We would have singled the unbelievers out for extra worldly blessings, because these blessings are worthless to Us and have no value in the marketplace of the hereafter.[1]

1 Note that the translation of these verses (43:33-35) presented here is according

Some say that "desiring the present" means desiring it through one's [religious] action. In other words, the verse is talking about those who do [righteous] acts in desire for this world instead of the hereafter. Thus, they will be deprived of the [good and reward of the] hereafter. However, this is an unnecessary restriction [of the meaning]. They may have taken it from His words: *Whoever desires this world's life and its finery, We will pay them in full their deeds therein, and they shall not be made to suffer loss in respect of them. These are they for whom there is nothing but fire in the hereafter* (11:15-16). Notwithstanding these two sets of verses have different purports. The purport of our current verses of discussion is to explain that someone who desires the world will attain nothing other than it. But the purport of the verse in Chapter 11 [11:15-16] is that one will attain nothing but his deeds; if he wants the world, his deeds will be paid in full therein. There is a clear difference between the two purports, so understand that.

…then We assign to him the hell; he shall enter it despised, driven away: That is: We make him to suffer the heat of hell in the hereafter as his reward, while he will be driven away and kept away from Our mercy. The two adverbs (despised and driven away) show that he will be completely handed over to hell, deprived of forgiveness and mercy.

Even though the verse is about the fate of whoever clings to this world and forgets and denies the hereafter, there are different levels of pursuit [of this world] and denial [of the hereafter]. Some people pursue the world practically and justify it theoretically. Others pursue this world in practice even though they believe in the hereafter deep within. This gradation is confirmed by what is to follow: *and certainly the hereafter is much superior…* (17:21).

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا ﴿١٩﴾

(17:19) ***And whoever desires the hereafter*** **(al-ākhirah)** ***and strives*** **(saʿā, from saʿy)** ***for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer; (as***

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to a slightly different meaning that has been suggested by many exegetes: We do not single out the unbelievers with blessings *in order to* prevent all of the people from becoming a single nation [of unbelief]. We wish to keep this world as an abode of test and trial, so that people do not choose either to believe or disbelieve because of anything other than genuine conviction. (Trans.)

for) these, their striving shall surely be accepted.

Al-Rāghib says: "*Saʿy* means walking quickly but not running. It is used for earnestness in a matter, whether good or bad."

Al-ākhirah (the other one, the hereafter) means the life of hereafter (that is, afterlife), in contrast to the previous verse: *Whoever desires this hasty [life]*. Just like the last verse, some exegetes have said that the verse is about those who seek the [good and reward of] the hereafter by their [righteous and religious] acts. This view was countered under the previous verse.

…and strives for it* (lahā) *as he ought to strive* (saʿyahā)*…: The letter *lām* in *lahā* ("for" in "for it") indicates exclusivity [that is, possession]. The same applies to *saʿyahā*, where *saʿy* (effort, endeavour) is attached to the pronoun *hā* which indicates the hereafter. It means one who strives and exerted effort for the hereafter as he ought to strive for it. It can be inferred from it that his striving for it ought to be appropriate to it and as it deserves, as one would exert his utmost effort in righteous deeds that are deduced from incontrovertible reason or legal evidence.

…and he is a believer…: That is, one who believes in God, which entails accepting God's unity, prophethood and resurrection. In His Book God does not count a person a believer if he does not accept any one of these three, as indicated by numerous verses.

Furthermore, the very appearance of this qualification (*and he is a believer*) indicates that it includes these aspects. This is because the verse is about those who desire the hereafter and strive for it, which means that the person certainly believes in God and in a life after this worldly life. Thus, the only justification for explicitly adding this qualification (*and he is a believer*) is to indicate the necessity of this belief being correct—part of which is that it should accompany belief in monotheism and prophethood. Hence, the very qualification of being a believer obviates the need to rely on other verses.

***…(as for) these, their striving shall surely be accepted* (mashkūran):** That is, God will thank them (*yashkuruhum*) by accepting him well and lauding his efforts. His thanks to a servant for his work means His bestowal of grace upon His servant in addition to His initial grace. The basis of rewarding a servant for his work is an act of grace, for it is part of a servant's duty to serve his Master without being entitled to any reward. Thus, His reward is a bestowal of grace. Then, lauding him in addition to His

reward is bestowal of another grace on top of the first. "Indeed God is the Lord of mighty grace" [2:105, 3:74, 8:29, 57:21, 57:29, 62:4].

These two verses indicate a point about otherworldly means and causes: In the hereafter actions never fail to meet their ends and objectives, as opposed to worldly means and causes. Concerning one who works for the hereafter He says: *(as for) these, their striving shall surely be accepted*, but concerning one who works for this world He says: *We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire…*[1]

كُلًّا نُمِدُّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ وَهَٰؤُلَاءِ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(17:20) *All do We aid* (numiddu, from madd)*—these as well as those—out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.*

Al-Mufradāt says [summarized]:

> The root meaning of *madda* is to pull or extend by drawing. Some usages of this root are: *muddah*, meaning protracted time; *middat al-jarḥ* (the thick purulent matter that collects in a wound); *madd al-nahr wa maddahu nahr ākhar* (the river flowed and another river flowed into it); *madadtu ʿaynī ilā kadhā* (I stretched my eye to something)—likewise He says: *And do not stretch* (tamuddanna) *your eyes* (20:131); *madadtuhu fī ghayyihi* (I made him continue in his error); *amdadtu al-jaysh bi-madad* (I provided the army with aid); *[amdadtu] al-insān bi-ṭaʿām* (I aided him with food). *Imdād* is mostly used for something which is liked, while madd is used for something that is hated. For example: *And We will aid them* (amdadnāhum) *with fruit and flesh such as they desire* (52:22); *and We will lengthen* (namuddu) *to him the length of the chastisement* (19:79); *And their brethren increase them* (yamuddūnahum) *in error* (7:202).

Imdād and *madd* of something mean adding to it of its kind by which its survival is extended and its existence continues, such that without it that

1 That is, the verse promises reward for those who work for the hereafter unconditionally. But the results of working for this world are subject to two conditions: 1. what or how much God wants; and 2. to whom He wants. (Trans.)

thing would be cut off, like a stream that is cut off from its fountainhead. A stream receives water continuously from its fountainhead and this is what makes it continue to flow.

God sustains humanity in their deeds—both those who desire the present life and those who desire the afterlife. This is because all things and factors that are needed for one's actions—such as knowledge, will, bodily functions and faculties, external materials that are employed and used, the means and conditions to which all these physical matters are linked—are existential matters beyond the human power and making. If he is missing one or all of them, then he cannot act. It is God Who effuses them through His grace, and aids mankind with them through His bounty. If He withholds His bounty, then the doer is deprived of his deed.

Everyone sustains by God's bounty—both the people of this world in their worldly life, and the people of the hereafter in their otherworldly life. Nothing but praise is due to Him for His bounty, because what He gives is a blessing to mankind to be used righteously, in a way that pleases one's Lord. But if the person transgresses by not using them in what he should, and thus distorts the word [of God's command] from its place, then he has no one to blame but himself. God still has to be praised for His beautiful work and He has the conclusive proof [against His servants].

"All" (in *All do We aid*) refers to the two abovementioned groups—that is, those to whom [what We please] is hastened [17:18], and those whose striving is accepted [17:19]. "All" (*kullan*) is the object, which has comes before the verb because of a special attention to it in the verse. The intention is to explain that the aid is provided for *both* groups.

…these as well as those…: "These" and "those" refer to those to whom [what God pleases] is hastened and those whose striving is accepted, while each of the two [groups] has its own case. The meaning effectively is: Both groups are supported by God's grace. God effuses His bounty upon them equally, except that one of them uses God's blessings to pursue the hereafter, so God appreciates his striving, while the other uses it to pursue the present life and forgets the hereafter, and thus will be left with nothing in the hereafter but misery and disappointment.

…out of the bounty of your Lord…: Neither they nor any other creature has a hand in anything that they use in their actions, as stated above. Rather, God is the Creator and Owner of these [bounties]. That is why it is attributed to Him.

This qualification justifies the abovementioned reward and retribution

of both groups, because they were sustained and assisted by God's pure blessing in doing any action. Therefore, it is befitting for whoever uses His blessing in the way of disbelief and transgression to suffer hellfire while being despised and driven away. Similarly, it is befitting for whoever uses His blessing in the way of belief and obedience to have his striving recognized.

There is in "your Lord (*Rabbika*)" a shift of address from the majestic plural to the third person, and the term has appeared twice in the verse. Apparently it indicates that their being aided is a result of God's attribute of Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*). Of course, there is only one lord and that is God, but since the idolaters have assumed other lords, the verse has described God as "your" Lord [that is, for distinction and clarification].

***…and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (maḥẓūran, from ḥaẓr):** *Maḥẓūran* means blocked and barred; ḥazr means block (*manᶜ*). The people of this world and the people of the hereafter all derive assistance from His bounty, are blessed with His blessing, and are obliged [to Him] by His grace.

The verse also suggests that divine bounty is absolute and not confined by any limit, as the verse refers to "the bounty of your Lord" without any qualification and negates confinement. The limitations, measures and confinements that are found in various places are only on the part of the recipient and the extent of its capacity and potential to receive effusions, not on the part of the One effusing.

A rather strange interpretation has been attributed to al-Ḥasan and Qatādah: that bounty means worldly bounty because it is common to both believers and unbelievers, while bounty in the hereafter is exclusive to the believers. The suggested meaning according to this would be: We aid both groups with present bounties, not just the first group that desires the present life; His worldly bounty is not withdrawn from anyone.

The problem with this interpretation is that it qualifies an unqualified term[1] while the context suits a lack of any qualification. As for what is said about bounty in the hereafter being exclusive to the believers without the unbelievers sharing it with them, it is beyond the remit of the verse. This verse is about the assistance that is given to people in doing deeds, which will in turn result in reward, not the reward that is given to them [either

1 That is, it qualifies "the bounty of your Lord" as "the worldly bounty of your Lord." (Trans.)

in this world or the hereafter]. The bounties that the believers receive in the hereafter are a form of reward and have nothing to do with deeds. The means and aids that sustain and assist both groups in their actions are what compose both worldly and otherworldly bounties. Furthermore, bounties in the hereafter are also for everyone; they are not blocked from anyone. The only restriction there is by the unbelievers [that is, on the recipient's side], just as is the case with regard to bounties in this world. One may be deprived of God's unqualified bounties in this world not because of any limit to God's giving of bounty, but because of the unsuitability of the recipient.

Rūḥ al-maʿānī says that the classification seen here is not comprehensive, and there is no harm in that. A comprehensive classification would have been that a doer either

i) intends only the present life by his deed;
ii) intends only the hereafter by his deed;
iii) intends both of them by his deed; or
iv) intends neither of them by his deed.

The case of the first two classes is known from the verse. The third one divides into three further categories: the doer's desire for the hereafter can be greater than, less than, or equal to his desire for the present.

He [Ālūsī, the author of *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*] then prolongs the discussion on those whose desire for the hereafter dominates their desire for the present life, and narrates the scholars' disagreement over the acceptance of this kind of deed. He cites their agreement on the non-acceptance of deeds where the worldly incentive is greater or where the two incentives are equal.

He says:

> The fourth category is impossible according to those who say that there is always an incentive behind the deed of a subject who is capable of acting. Those who say that actions do not necessarily depend on incentives hold that such action [without any incentive] is unlawful according to the apparent law, and has no impact inwardly.[1]

There are other exegetes earlier to him who made and discussed such

1 Outwardly unlawful means that one should not act with such intention. Inwardly ineffective means that there will be neither punishment nor reward for it in the hereafter. (Trans.)

classification.

However, you know very well that the purpose of these noble verses is not to explain the rule for rejection or acceptance of every deed issued from a doer. Rather, they look at one's purpose and specify it based on his preferred abode. This preferred abode could be the present life. If so, an implication of this is that the person would not desire anything but material and worldly prosperity, without any regard for the other life. Alternatively, one's main abode could be the afterlife, which necessitates that the person sees an everlasting and eternal life for himself. A part of this eternal life—that is, one's life in this world—prepares the grounds for another part—that is, one's life after death. The intention behind his deeds in this world is happiness in the other.

Obviously this division produces only two categories. True, one of the two categories [the latter] divides into sub-categories that are not fully addressed in the verse, only because they fall outside the purpose of the verses. Those who desire the hereafter may strive for it as they should, or they may not strive for it as they should—such as sinners and innovators. Furthermore, either group may or may not be believers. His words only outline the rule for a particular group: whoever desires the hereafter, strives for it as he ought to strive, and is a believer. This is because the purpose here is to differentiate between the reason for happiness from the reason for wretchedness, not to give a detailed breakdown of all cases.

انْظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَلَلْآخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٢١﴾

(17:21) ***See how We have made some of them to excel others, and verily the hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in preferment.***

This alludes to the different degrees of individuals according to their different amounts of striving, so as to avoid giving the mistaken impression that little work and much work are equal, or that there is no difference between slight striving and intense striving. Indeed, if good and bad are equally accepted, and if little and much are equally rewarded, then it means the rejection of the surplus by which the better exceeds others.

See how We have made some of them to excel others…: That is, see how We made some of them superior to others in this world. This qualification

[of "this world"] is deduced from the context as He subsequently says: and verily the hereafter will be greater. What is meant by "excellence in this world" is what some of its inhabitants excel others at, including worldly possessions and endowments such as wealth, prestige, children, power, status, leadership, sovereignty and acceptance by the people.

…and verily the hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in preferment: That is, it is greater than this world in degrees and preferment. Hence, no one should suppose that people will have equal lives in the hereafter, or that the differences between lives there will be like the differences between lives in this world. On the contrary, that abode is immeasurably vaster than this world. That is because the privileges in this world are due to material causes which are limited and this world is a realm of competition and mutual obstruction. But privileges and differences of levels in the hereafter are due to the differences of souls in terms of belief and sincerity, which are states of the heart, and the states of the heart differ far more greatly than the physical states. They are not even comparable. He says: *and whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, God will call you to account according to it* (2:284), and: *The day on which property will not avail, nor sons except him who comes to Allah with a heart free (from evil)* (26:88-89).

The verse commands the Prophet to reflect on the differences of people in worldly merits and positions in order to understand their differences of levels and merits in the hereafter. The connection is that different [spiritual] conditions in this world lead to different understandings and intentions, which in turn cause different actions to be easier to perform. These different actions will then lead to the difference of levels in the hereafter.

لَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا آخَرَ فَتَقْعُدَ مَذْمُومًا مَّخْذُولًا ﴿٢٢﴾

(17:22) *Do not associate with Allah any other god, lest you sit down* (fa-taqʿuda, from quʿūd) *despised, neglected* (makhdhūlan, from khidhlān).

Al-Mufradāt says, "*Khidhlān* means lack of aid from someone who is expected to provide aid."

The verse serves as a conclusion to the previous verses that discussed God's custom concerning His servants. They ended by saying that whoever among them desires the present life will end up suffering hell, despised

and neglected; while whoever among them desires the hereafter God will be grateful for his beautiful striving. The implied meaning here is: Do not associate [partners] with God, because that would lead you to sit down and be prevented from traveling to levels of nearness. You will be despised and unassisted by God or any other helper. It is said that *quʿūd* (sitting) is a metaphorical way of talking about humiliation and incapacity.

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 17:9 (*Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright*), Imam al-Ṣādiq said:
It [that is, "guides"] means "calls."[1]

(2) Concerning the same verse, Imam al-Bāqir said:
It guides to [belief in] guardianship (*wilāyah*).[2]

Author's comment: This is an example of conformity (*jary*). It might mean guidance to the complete knowledge of the religion that the Imam has. This could be the intended meaning of some narrations that say: It [the Qur'an] guides to the Imam.

(3) Concerning verse 17:13 (*And We have made every man's bird of omen to cling to his neck*), Imam al-Bāqir said:
One's good and evil are with him wherever he is. He is not able to leave them aside until he is given his record of deeds.[3]

(4) Concerning the same verse, Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq said:
He [God] is the One Who has given him [the human being] the power to do what he does.[4]

(5) Concerning verse 17:14 (*Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day*), Imam al-Ṣādiq said:
The servant remembers everything he has done and that is recorded against him as if he had done it that moment. That is why they say: *Ah! woe to us! what a book is this! it does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all)* (18:49).[5]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd

4 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah, Ḥamrān and Muḥammad b. Muslim.

5 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Khālid b. Yaḥyā.

(6) Concerning verse 17:16 (*And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the affluent ones*), Imam al-Bāqir said: "The word in verse 17:16 is *ammarnā*, with a stress (*shaddah*). It means: We made them multiply." The Imam also said: "I have not read it without a stress (that is, *amarnā*)."[1]

(7) In another narration Imam al-Bāqir said:
It means We commanded its chieftains (*akābirahā*).[2]

Author's comment: There are some traditions that both Shias and Sunnis have narrated from the Prophet, ʿAlī, Salmān and others concerning verses 17:11 (*And man prays for evil…*), 17:12, (*And We have made the night and the day two signs…*) and 17:13 (*And We have made every man's bird of omen to cling to his neck…*), but we refrained from citing them because they are unsupported by the Book, the Sunnah or established rational principles, not to mention the weakness in their chains of narration.

A Discussion on Decree (*qaḍāʾ*)

Its Definition and Meaning

When we consider external events and existential affairs and compare them with their causes and means, we find them to be at either of two states:

One is when the necessary causes are not complete yet, the conditions have not been met, and/or its impediments have not been removed. At this stage, neither existence nor non-existence is determined and fixed for that matter. The event wavers between realization and non-realization.

Once the necessary causes are complete, all conditions are met, and there are no impediments, then nothing remains for the event but to be realized. Thus, it emerges from wavering and ambiguity, and one of the two possibilities becomes definite and determined for it: existence. But if any of the requirements for the occurrence of the event [that is, causes, conditions and lack of impediments] is missing, then the other possibility is determined: non-existence. It should be noted that existence is necessarily determined for itself.[3]

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ḥumrān.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ḥumrān.

3 Therefore, there is no need for another cause to bestow existence upon existence

These two states also apply to our external actions. As long as we are not about to perform any act, any given action wavers between being performed and not being performed. If its causes and conditions come together, and if they are completed by our will and determination, there will be nothing left for it but to occur. In this case, one of the two possibilities is determined for it: occurrence.

The same two states apply to our conventional affairs and ascriptions. For instance, when two people dispute over to whom something belongs, its ownership wavers between the two individuals. Then, when they go to a judge to settle their dispute and he rules in favor of one of them, this rule severs the matter from ambiguity and uncertainty; it determines and establishes the connection of the object to one of the two individuals and disconnects it from the other.

This is an extension on the meaning of *qaḍāʾ* because it assumes a verbal judgment and determination to be similar to judgment and determination of actions. Hence when the judge says that the property belongs to one of the two litigants, his words serve as a decisive judgment for the dispute and the determination of one of the two sides after their state of uncertainty. Likewise, when someone says, "x is y," this is a decisive judgment (*faṣl*) and determination (*taʿyīn*), and this is what we call decree (*qaḍāʾ*).

Since the existence and realization of all events are attributable to God as His actions, the two considerations apply there as well: As long as God has not willed the occurrence of an event and as long as its necessary causes and conditions are incomplete, it remains wavering between occurrence and non-occurrence. But once God has willed its happening and completes its causes and all conditions, nothing is left for it but to be brought into existence. This is God's determination (*taʿyīn*) of one side for the event, and its severance (*faṣl*) from the other side, which removes the ambiguity. This is called a decree by God.

These two considerations apply in a like manner to the plane of legislation (*tashrīʿ*). His decisive command and ruling about something is a decree (*qaḍāʾ*) by Him.

His existential (*takwīnī*) decree is seen in many verses such as:

And when He decrees (qaḍā) *an affair, He only says to it, Be, so there it is.* (2:117);

So He ordained them (qaḍāhunn) *seven heavens in two periods.* (41:12);

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itself. (Trans.)

The matter is decreed (qaḍā) *concerning which you inquired.* (12:41);
And We had made known (wa qaḍaynā) *to the children of Israel in the Book: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice.* (17:4)
Examples of verses addressing legislative decree are:
And your Lord has commanded (qaḍā) *that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents.* (17:23)
Surely your Lord will judge (yaqḍī) *between them on the resurrection day concerning that in which they disagreed.* (10:93)
And judgment shall be given between them with justice, and it shall be said: All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. (39:75)

Decree in this last verse and the verses before it [in Chapter 39] is legislative settlement of disputes in one respect, and existential decree in another.

These noble verses, as you can see, confirm the two senses of God's *qaḍā*ʾ (decree, judgment): It is applied to existential things as they are God's [cosmic and creative] acts, and to the divine legislations as they are His legislative acts. The same is true about decisive judgment attributed to Him.

This decree is sometimes referred to as *ḥukm* (judgment) and sometimes as *qawl* (speech, word). He says:

Now surely His is the judgment (al-ḥukm). (6:62)
And Allah pronounces a doom (yaḥkumu)—*there is no repeller of His decree* (li-ḥukmihi). (13:41)
My word shall not be changed. (50:29)
And the truth do I speak (aqūlu, from qawl). (38:84)

A Philosophical View Concerning Decree

There is no doubt that the law of cause and effect is correct and that a contingent existent is an effect of God either directly or through an intermediary. If we consider an effect along with its ascription to its complete cause, then it derives necessity [of existence] from its complete cause. This is because as long as [the existence of] something is not necessitated, it does not exist.[1] But if we consider an effect by itself and irrespective of its complete cause, then it will be contingent. Thus is the case whether it is

1 This is based on the above discussion, that the complete cause determines existence for the effect over non-existence. Therefore, assuming the presence of the complete cuase, the effect would be characterized by necessity of existence. (Trans).

looked at in isolation and unlinked to anything, such as contingent quiddities per se; or it is considered along with some of its complete cause. Either way it will be contingent, because if it is necessary, it would mean that its cause is complete, while the premise is the opposite.

Necessity means the determination of one side [that is, either existence or non-existence], which puts an end to the state of uncertainty of an event. Thus, if we consider the entire chain of contingent beings with regard to its link to the Necessary Being, then each contingent being derives necessity from Him within its specific container [of time and place, or existential plane]. This general necessity that encompasses the chain of contingent beings is a universal decree by Him, just as the necessity specific to each of them is a particular decree by Him, for by decree we mean nothing but the determination of one of the two sides, as opposed to a state of indetermination and uncertainty.

This shows that decree (*qaḍāʾ*) is an attribute of divine actions (*al-ṣifāt al-fiʿliyyah*). It is derived from an act's (*fiʿl*) relationship with its complete cause that necessitates it.

The Narrations Concerning Decree

There are a great number of narrations supporting the above:

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said:
When God wants something He allots it, and when He allots it He decrees it, and when He decrees it He enacts it.[1]

(2) Imam al-Kāẓim said to Yūnus, Mawlā (client, freedman) of ʿAlī b. Yaqṭīn:
"O Yūnus! Do not talk about predestination (*qadar*)." He [Yūnus] replied, "Surely I do not talk about predestination, but I say: Nothing will happen except that which God wants (*arāda*), wills (*shāʾa*), decrees (*qadā*) and allots (*qaddara*)." He [the Imam] said: "But that is not what I say. Instead I say: Nothing will happen except that which God wills, wants, allots and decrees." He then asked: "Do you know what *mashiyyah* (will) is?" He replied, "No." He said, "It is when He decides to do something. Do you know what His *irādah* (want) is?" He replied, "No." He said: "It is the perfection of His *mashiyyah*." He then said: "And do you know

1 *Al-Maḥāsin*, on the authority of the author's father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Hishām b. Sālim.

what *qadar* (allotment) is?" He replied: "No." He said, "It is giving proportions in terms of length, width and duration." He then said: "Surely, when God wills something He wants it, and when He wants it He allots it. When He allots it He decrees it, and when He decrees it He enacts it…"[1]

(3) Another narration on the authority of Yūnus, from Imam al-Kāẓim:

Nothing will be except for what God wills, wants, allots and decrees. I asked, "What does it mean that He wills something (*shāʾa*)?" He replied, "It means beginning the act." I asked, "What does it mean that He wants something (*arāda*)?" He replied, "It means persisting at it." I asked, "What does it mean that He allots something (*qaddara*)?" He replied: "It means giving the thing its measures of length and width." I asked: "What does it mean that He decrees something (*qaḍā*)?" He replied, "Decreeing means enacting. Once He does so, then it is irreversible."[2]

(4) "The knowledgeable" [that is, Imam al-Kāẓim] was asked, How is God's knowledge? He replied:

He knows, wills, wants, allots, decrees and enacts. That is, He enacts what He has decreed; He decrees what He has allotted; and He allots what He has wanted. Therefore, His will is according to His knowledge; His want is according to His will; His allotment is according to His want; His decree is according to His allotment; and His enactment is according to His decree. Hence, first is knowledge, second is will, and third is want. Allotment is realized by a decree that has been enacted. It is for God to change what He has willed as He knows, and what He has allotted as He wants; but once His decree is enacted then there is no change…[3]

Author's comment: What he says about the order of knowledge, will, want and so on is a rational order based on a correct [rational] derivation.

(5) The Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī] moved from the vicinity of a crooked wall to another wall. He was asked, "O

1 *Al-Maḥāsin*, on the authority of the author's father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Isḥāq.

2 *Al-Maḥāsin*.

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*, on the authority of al-Daqqāq, on the authority of al-Kulaynī, on the authority of Ibn ʿĀmir, on the authority of al-Muʿallā.

Commander of the Faithful! Are you fleeing from God's decree?" He replied: "I flee from God's decree to God's allotment."[1]
Author's comment: That is because allotment does not make that which is allotted inevitable. There can be hope that what has been allotted may not happen. But once it is decreed, it is unstoppable. There are many narrations which mean the same as the above, via the Imams from the Prophet's Household.

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Another Philosophical Discussion

Based on verse 17:20 (*and the bounty of your Lord is not confined*), it can be inferred that God's effusion is unconditional and unlimited.

Rational arguments are all unanimous that the existence of the Necessary Being is absolute, for it is inherently necessary. His existence is not delimited by any limit, restricted by any restriction, or conditional upon any condition. Otherwise it means that it does not exist beyond its limit, and would totally be lost with the absence of its condition. Given that He is inherently necessary,[2] He must be One—such one that has no conceivable second to it. Also, He must be Absolute—such absolute that would never take any condition.

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Furthermore, it has been proven that the existence of everything else is an effect worked by Him. We also know that an act is necessarily congruous to its doer. Hence, the effect issuing from Him is also one—a true one that reflects the Ultimate One (*waḥdat ḥaqqah ẓilliyyah*). His act must also be absolute and unlimited; otherwise, His Essence would be composed of two things: 1) a limit; and 2) what takes the limit. In other words, His Essence would be composed of existence and non-existence. The essential dichotomy between these two [that is, existence and non-existence] would apply to the Doer's Essence as there must be some congruence between the Doer and His deed. However, this is against the original premise that He is absolutely One. Therefore existence, which is His act and effect, is also one and not many, absolute and not limited.

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It then follows that the differences of the contingent beings which

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Nubātah.

2 That is, it is necessary by the merit of itself. It derives its necessity from its own Essence, which means there is nothing beyond it to delimit or confine it. (Trans.)

indicate their limitations—in terms of perfection and imperfection, or having and missing—are attributable to themselves, not to their Creator.[1]

The differences between species or their essential requirements—as there is between man and horse—are due to their different quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) which are the receptacle of existence. But differences in secondary perfections—such as the difference of shares and perfections among the individuals of a species—are due to their different material potentialities that are a result of preparatory causes that prepare an individual to receive from the emanative cause (*al-ʿillat al-mufīḍah*).

The preparatory cause (*al-ʿillat al-muʿiddah*) has a single absolute effusion. However, the receptacles are many according to their different receiving capacities. There are some receptacles that do not accept the effusion at all, but embrace the exact opposite [of that effusion]. There are other receptacles that fully accept the effusion, and there are those [in between] that receive the effusion partially and convert it to a form that matches their particular potentiality. It is like the sun which radiates one light with uniform parts, but then the bodies receiving its light dispose of it according to their capacity and potentiality.

You might object that undoubtedly these differences are real. If the quiddities and capacities deemed to be the root of them are illusory and unreal matters, it makes no sense to attribute these real things to them. Thus, these differences would go back to existence which is the effect of the True Creator. This, however, contradicts the claim that God's effusion is unconditional. And if those quiddities and capacities are also real matters as opposed to illusory ones, then they would also be of the same nature as existence, as per the principality and primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). So again these differences would be attributable to God's act [of effusion],[2] which contradicts the above claim [of absoluteness of God's effusion].

The answer to this is: Our view above defines all different existents to be of the same single reality of existence, which leaves no room for any

1 That is, these differences, limitations and imperfections are due to the limitation of their capacity as recipients of God's unlimited effusion of the single and absolute reality of existence. (Trans.)

2 The opposite of effusion would be a non-existential matter, not another existential effusion, because it was proven above that God's effect and effusion is absolutely one. (Trans.)

difference. What remains is a single shadowy existence (*wujūd ẓillī*) that subsists by the single prime existence. This leaves no room at all for the above objection.

In other words, dividing absolute existent into quiddity and existence, or into potentiality and actuality, is what has brought about negations [that is, non-existence, due to demarcations] in reality. It is thus that things are classified into haves and have nots, perfect and deprived, receptacle and effusion. The source of these classifications is the mental analysis of things into:

(1) quiddity, which is receptive to existence; and
(2) existence, which is received by quiddity.

Likewise is the analysis of things into:

(1) potentialities that lack actuality; and
(2) actualities that oppose potentiality. But if we retrace all things to the single absolute reality of existence [instead of mentally decomposing them], there would be no room to discuss the cause of differences. In that case, the Creator's effect—that is, effusion—would be absolutely one with no multiplicity or limit to it. Contemplate this!

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Verses 23-39

These are a number of universal principles of the religion stated by God which follow what He says a few verses earlier: *Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright…* (17:9)

Commentary

وَقَضَى رَبُّكَ أَلاَّ تَعْبُدُوا إِلاَّ إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَاناً إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلاهُمَا فَلا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلاً كَرِيماً ﴿٢٣﴾

(17:23) ***And your Lord has decreed that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them (so much as) "Ugh" nor chide them, and speak to them gracious words.***

"That you shall not serve (any) but Him": This is a negation and exception, where the particle *an* ("that") turns what follows into an infinitive (*an maṣdariyyah*). It could also be that this expression is a prohibition and exception, where the particle an either turns the subsequent part into an infinitive or turns it into an exposition of the previous part.[1] Either way, the excepted element (*mustathnā*) and antecedent (*mustathnā minhu*) can be broken down into two phrases: "Serve Him" and "do not serve anyone else." These two phrases can alternatively be construed as a single command: to serve him alone.

Whether the statement is broken down into two phrases or interpreted as a single phrase, it is the object of decree (*qaḍā'*). Decree here is

1 A negation and exception means that the verse is in the indicative mood: It is informing the audience about what God has decreed legislatively. Turning the subsequent part to an infinitive means that God has decreed the act of not serving anything but Him… A prohibition and exception means that the verse is in the imperative mood: It is ordering the audience what to do or what not to do. (Trans.)

legislative decree (*al-qaḍāʾ al-tashrīʿī*), which pertains to shariah rulings and injunctions. It is a decisive rule and an incontrovertible command. Such decree can equally apply to commands and prohibitions; it can establish negative rulings just as it establishes positive rulings. But had this been worded as a "command" (*amr*)—that is, "your Lord has commanded (*amara*) that you shall not serve (any) but Him"—then its inclusion of a prohibition would have been figurative and metaphorical.

The command to serving God sincerely [that is, Him alone] is the greatest commandment of religion. The duty to serve Him exclusively is the greatest of all duties, just as disobeying this command—that is, associating partners with Him—is the greatest of all major sins. He says: *Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases* (4:48).

All sins can ultimately be reduced to this, because if it were not for yielding to something other than God—like devils among the jinn or mankind, or one's own desire and ignorance—then one would not disobey what his Lord has commanded him to do or forbidden him from doing. *Ṭāʿah* (obedience, compliance) is *ʿibādah* (service, worship). He says: *Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan?* (36:60); *Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god…?* (45:23).

Even an unbeliever who denies the existence of the Maker (*al-Ṣāniʿ*) is a polytheist, because while his primary nature (*fiṭrah*) attests to the Creator, he ascribes the conduct and direction of affairs in the world to matter, nature, history or something else.

It is due to its significance that this rule has preceded the other important rules that follow, including [the prohibition of] being undutiful toward one's parents, withholding one's financial dues, squandering, killing one's children, adultery, killing an innocent soul, taking the property of orphans, breaching a vow, cheating on weight, following something without knowledge, and arrogance. He then concludes these by forbidding polytheism a second time [in verse 17:39].

…and goodness* (iḥsānan) *to your parents: This adds to the previous phrase. That is: And your Lord has commanded you to be thoroughly good to your parents. *Iḥsān* (doing good) is the opposite of isāʾah (doing evil). This is one of the greatest obligatory duties after observing God's unity (tawḥīd), just as being undutiful toward them is one of the greatest major sins after associating partners with God. That is why He refers to it

after commanding to monotheism and puts it before all the other stated and enumerated rules. This [order] is also seen in a number of other places in the Qur'an.[1]

It was discussed earlier under a similar verse—verse 6:151—that the emotional bond between the parents and the child is one of the greatest relationships that sustain the human society. It is a very natural means for holding married couples together. One's primary nature commands to this societal tradition of respecting one's parents, honoring them and being kind to them. If this rule is not practiced and a society stops observing it, then the children's emotional ties and connections to their parents will cease and all social bonds will unravel.

…If* (immā) *either or both of them reach old age* (kibar) *with you, say not to them (so much as) "Ugh"* (uff) *nor chide them* (la tanharhumā, from nahr)*, and speak to them a gracious word: *Immā* is in fact *in-mā*, made up of the conditional particle in and an extra *mā*. It is what makes it correct to add the emphatic letter *nūn* to the verb in the conditional clause [that is, *yablughanna*]. *Kibar* means old age. *Uff* is a word that indicates one's irritation and resentment. *Nahr* means chiding by shouting, raising one's voice and speaking harshly.

Mentioning old age in particular is because it is the most difficult stage that one's parents pass through, during which they feel the need for their children's help to cover for their life's duties which they are unable to perform.

That is one of the things which parents hope and expect of their children when they raise them and bring them up when they are little and at a time when they have no ability to do any of life's necessary things.

Thus the verse indicates the incumbency of honoring them and being on one's best behavior at all times when dealing with them and speaking to them, especially when they most need it, which is when one or both of them reach old age in the child's presence. The meaning of the verse is clear.

وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَّبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيراً ﴿٢٤﴾

1 See verses 4:83, 5:36, 6:151, 31:13-14. (Trans.)

(17:24) ***And make yourself submissively gentle to them*** **(ikhfaḍ lahumā janāḥ al-dhull)** ***with compassion, and say: O my Lord! have compassion on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little.***

Khafḍ al-janāḥ is a metaphor for extreme humility and submissiveness in speech and action. It is derived from a young bird's lowering (*khafḍ*) its wing to implore its mother to feed it. That is why the verse says "the wing of submissiveness," for that is the habit of young birds when they want to be fed by their mothers. The implied meaning is: Face them when dealing with them in a way which shows your humility, submissiveness and subservience to them out of compassion for them. This is if *dhull* means humility. It could also mean acquiescence (*muṭāwaʿah*), which is derived from a bird's lowering its wing to gather its young underneath itself out of compassion for them and to protect them.

…and say: O my Lord! have compassion on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little: That is: Remember their bringing you up when you were little, and pray to God to have compassion on them just as they had compassion on you and brought you up when you were little.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says, "It can be deduced from this [command] that a child's prayer for his dead parent is heard. Otherwise it would make no sense to command to it." What can be deduced is the *possibility* that such prayer will be answered. Even if one's parents do not benefit from such prayer, this is a religious etiquette that benefits the child. Furthermore, there is no apparent reason to say that it is exclusive to prayer for a dead parent given that the verse is unqualified [by such condition].

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمْ إِنْ تَكُونُوا صَالِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ لِلْأَوَّابِينَ غَفُوراً ﴿٢٥﴾

(17:25) ***Your Lord knows best what is in your minds; if you are good, then He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him) frequently.***

The context indicates that this verse is related to what precedes it: the duty to be kind to one's parents and the sin of undutifulness toward them. Thus, this verse concerns cases when a child impulsively says or does something that hurts his parents or violates their rights. The verse

has not explicitly mentioned this in order to indicate that it is not befitting to even speak of such behavior, just as it is not befitting to perform it.

Your Lord knows best what is in your minds: That is: He knows it better than you. This is a prelude to what follows (if you are good). The implied meaning is: If you are indeed characterized by goodness and God knows this from your hearts, *then He is surely…*

…then He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him) frequently: This is about those who come back to Him upon every act of disobedience. It is an example of stating a general rule in the place of a particular application.

The implied meaning is: Assuming that you are good and God knows this from your hearts, if you return and repent to Him after an outburst from you against your parents, then God will forgive you for that. He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him) frequently.

وَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا ﴿٢٦﴾

(17:26) ***And give to the near of kin his due and (to) the needy and the wayfarer, and do not squander wastefully.***

This verse has already been discussed with regard to similar verses. This verse shows that giving to the near of kin, the needy and the wayfarer was legislated before the migration, because it is a Meccan verse in a Meccan chapter.

…and do not squander wastefully **(lā tubadhdhir tabdhīran)***: Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says:

> *Tabdhīr* means to scatter wastefully. Its root meaning is to scatter something the way seeds (sing. *badhr*) are scattered, except that it is particularly used in a scattering that is done in a destructive way. What is done in a constructive manner is not called *tabdhīr* even if there is a lot of it.

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ ۖ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا ﴿٢٧﴾

(17:27) ***Surely the squanderers are the brothers of the Satans and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.***

This is the reason for why squandering is being prohibited. It means: Do not squander. If you do squander, you will surely be one of the

squanderers, and the squanderers are the brothers of the devils. They are brothers in the sense that there is a bond between them like two full brothers that are counterparts in their common root. He has alluded to this in these verses:

And We have appointed for them comrades (41:25).

Gather together those who were unjust and their associates (37:22).

"Their associates" (*azwājahum*) here are "their comrades" (*Qur'anā*ʾ) [in verse 41:25].

And their brethren increase them in error, then they cease not. (7:202)

This clarifies the merit of those who have interpreted "the brothers of the devils" as "the devils' associates" over those who have interpreted it as "the devils' followers that tread their path."

…and Satan* (al-Shayṭān) *is ever ungrateful to his Lord: Satan means Iblīs, who is the father of the devils, who are in turn his offsprings and hosts. Based on this, the article *al* [in *al-Shayṭān*] is a definitive one that refers to a particular instance of *Shayṭān* [that is, Iblīs] that is already known in the audience's mind. It is also possible that the article denotes the genus, that is, the genus of the devils (sing. *shayṭān*). In any event, his being ungrateful to his Lord is because he is ungrateful for God's blessings, for he spends the strength, power and ability that God has given him in the way of leading people astray, directing them to disobedience, and calling them to sin and ungratefulness toward His blessings.

Now it should be clear why the verse first says *shayāṭīn* (devils) in plural, but then *Shayṭān* (Satan) in singular. This is because what is being said first is that every squanderer is a brother to a specific devil, which makes all of them brothers to devils [in plural]. But what is meant in the second part of the verse is either Iblīs—the father of the devils—or the genus of devils.

وَإِمَّا تُعْرِضَنَّ عَنْهُمُ ابْتِغَاءَ رَحْمَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكَ تَرْجُوهَا فَقُلْ لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَيْسُورًا ﴿٢٨﴾

(17:28) *And if* (immā) *you turn away* (tuʿriḍanna) *from them to seek mercy from your Lord, which you hope for, speak to them a gentle word.*

What is meant by *immā* is just the particle in (lit. "if"), and the extra *mā* is added for emphasis. Letter *nūn* [in *tuʿriḍanna*: "you turn away"] is

also for emphasis.

The context testifies that this verse is talking about spending money. Thus, "if you turn away from them" means turning away from whoever asks one for some money to give him in order to fulfil his need. Yet it does not include every kind of turning away however it may be, but only turning away when one does not have any money to give the person to spend on himself, while he is also hopeful of getting a hold of some [in the near future]. This is inferred from His following words: to seek mercy from your Lord, which you hope for. That is, you are turning away from them neither because you are stingy despite being loaded with money, nor because you do not have anything and are not anticipating to find anything, but because you do not have any money yet you seek, strive and hope to get a hold of some mercy from your Lord—that is, His sustenance.

…speak to them a gentle word: That is: Be easy and lenient in speech; do not speak roughly and do not refuse drily, as He says: *And as for him who asks, do not chide (him)* (93:10). Instead, refuse them with an easy, gentle word.

Al-Kashshāf says:

> "To seek mercy from your Lord" could be a complement of the apodosis that has come later. In other words: Be lenient and gentle in your speech with them, and make them a beautiful promise out of mercy for them, that you may soothe and pacify their hearts—do this "to seek mercy from your Lord." That is, seek the mercy that you hope for from your Lord by showing mercy to them.
>
> Alternatively, it could be a complement of the protasis. That is: If you turn away from them because you do not have any sustenance from your Lord yet you hope that He will bring about an opening for you, then turn them away pleasantly. Here, mercy refers to sustenance, and "seeking" means "missing," because one who is short of sustenance hopes and wishes for it. Missing [something] is a reason to wish for it, and wishing for it is the effect of [missing it]. Hence the effect has been put in the place of the cause.

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا ﴿٢٩﴾

(17:29) ***And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck***

nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth, lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off.

"Making the hand to be shackled to the neck" is a metaphorical way of talking about withholding, like the case of one who does not give or donate because of miserliness and avarice. "Stretching the hand to the utmost" is a metaphor for donating everything that one has such that nothing is left, like one who opens his palm completely flat such that it cannot hold anything [like rainwater]. Thus, the verse involves an emphasized prohibition against either extreme with regard to donation.

***…lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off* (maḥsūran, from ḥasr).** This is a consequence of "nor stretch it forth to the utmost…" *Ḥasr* means being cut off, or being naked. The implied meaning is: Do not stretch your hand forth to the utmost of its stretching forth, because that would make you sit down while being blameworthy to yourself and others. It will also cut you off from the necessities of life, or it will leave you naked, such that you cannot come out among the people, meet them and deal with them.

Some exegetes have suggested that "lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off"is a consequence of both of the previous sentences, not just a consequence of the second one. The implied meaning would then be: If you withhold, then you will sit down blamed and censurable; and if you spend excessively, then you will be regretful and depressed.

The problem with this meaning is that there is no evidence that the apparent meaning of "nor stretch it forth to the utmost" is a prohibition of squander and prodigality. Likewise, spending all of one's wealth in the way of God is not necessarily squander or extravagance, even though it is being prohibited in this verse. As we said above, *tabdhīr* (squander) is defined as improper and inappropriate spending. However, spending a large amount or all of one's wealth in God's way and for those who deserve it is not improper use of it. Therefore, there is no reason to regret or sorrow for something that is not lost itself and does not cause the loss of anything else.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٣٠﴾

(17:30) ***Surely your Lord makes plentiful the means of subsistence for whom He pleases and He straightens (them); surely He is ever***

Aware of, Seeing, His servants.

The apparent context of the verses suggests that this verse is a justification for the prohibition of either extremes in donation mentioned in the last verse.

The implied meaning is: This is your Lord's custom and tradition that He expands His sustenance for whomever He wishes, and contracts it for whomever He wishes. He neither expands it to the utmost nor withholds it altogether, and He does this according to the welfare of His servants, for He is ever Aware of and Seeing His servants. Thus it is befitting that you also adopt the conduct and manners of your Lord by following a path of moderation and avoiding either extremes.

Some exegetes have said that this verse justifies the previous one by saying that the expansion and contraction of sustenance exclusively belong to God. It is a divine affair and you should not take charge of it. Instead, you must keep a balance, without deviating from it to either more or less. Others have suggested other interpretations for how this verse may justify the previous one, but all of them are unlikely explanations.

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ ۖ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٣١﴾

(17:31) ***And do not kill your children for fear of poverty*** **(al-imlāq)*****; We give them sustenance and yourselves (too); surely to kill them is a great wrong*** **(khiṭʾan).**

Imlāq means poverty and need. *Al-Mufradāt* says [summarized]:

> *Khaṭaʾ* means deviating in direction. There are a few types of it:
> 1. Intending what should not be intended and done. This is a total wrong for which one will be held accountable. Its conjugates are *khaṭiʾah yakhṭaʾu khiṭʾan*. He says: *Surely to kill them is a great wrong* [17:31]; *and We were certainly sinners* [12:91].
> 2. Intending something good, but missing the target. It is said: *akhṭaʾa ikhṭāʾan* [that is, he made a mistake] and the doer is called a *mukhṭiʾ*. Such a person has the right intention but the wrong action. This is what is meant where He says: *Whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave* [4:92].
> 3. Intending what is wrong but accidentally missing it. Such a

> person has the wrong intention but the right action. He deserves rebuke for his intention and no praise for his action.
>
> Overall, whenever one intends something but happens to miss it [in practice] it is called that "he missed" (*akhṭaʾa*), while if he does what he was intending it is called that "he hit" (*aṣāba*). Sometimes anyone who either intends or does a wrong act is said to have "missed." That is why it is said [and it could be] that one "hits the wrong," "misses the right," "hits the right," or "misses the wrong." As you can see, this is a common term that is used for more than one meaning. So one should ponder and research in order to obtain what is meant [in each case].

The verse involves a severe prohibition against killing one's children for fear of poverty and need. "We give them sustenance and yourselves (too)": This justifies the prohibition and sets the grounds for what follows: surely to kill them is a great wrong.

The implied meaning is: Do not kill your children for fear of being afflicted by poverty and need—on the grounds that you would lose your honor by forcing them [your children] to accept the disgrace of beggary, forcing you to give your daughters in marriage to men who are not a match, or other unwanted consequences. You are not the ones who sustain them now, so how could you fear failing to do so due to poverty and hardship?! Rather, We are the Ones Who sustain them and you. Surely to kill them is a great wrong.

The command against killing one's children in fear of poverty and need has appeared more than once in His Book. This falls under killing an innocent soul, which His Book has prohibited with utmost emphasis. Yet, this specific type of killing an innocent soul has been separately addressed and particularly prohibited because it is the most reprehensible evil and the most intense form of hardheartedness. It has been said that the Arabs used to live in lands where there were frequent famines and droughts. Whenever there were indications of poverty and hardship due to an upcoming famine or any other cause, they used to start killing their children right away, in fear of losing their honor and pride. This could be another reason for this particular prohibition.

Al-Kashshāf says:

> Killing their children [in this verse] refers to their custom of burying their daughters alive. They used to bury their daughters alive in fear of poverty and need, so God has prohibited them

against it by guaranteeing their sustenance.

However, this is apparently not true. The verses that address the issue of burying daughters alive are other verses that explicitly talk about it and prohibit it. For example, He says: *And when the female infant buried alive is asked: For what sin she was killed?* (81:8-9); *And when a daughter is announced to one of them his face becomes black and he is full of wrath. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge* (16:58-59).

But the current verse of discussion—and other similar verses to it[1]—prohibit the killing of children out of fear of poverty, and there is no reason why children here should be restricted to girls while the term is not limited to that. Likewise, there is no reason why "fear of poverty" [in this verse] should be interpreted as "disgrace" [in 16:59] because they are two different concepts. The truth is that this verse talks about another evil custom—other than burying daughters alive to avoid disgrace—and that is the custom of killing one's children—boy or girl—in fear of poverty and need. This is what these verses prohibit.

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزِّنَا ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٣٢﴾

(17:32) *And go nigh to adultery; surely it is an indecency and an evil way.*

This verse prohibits adultery in an exaggerated way, because it commands against even getting close to it. This prohibition is justified by saying, "surely it is an indecency," which shows that indecency is an inseparable quality of adultery. Furthermore, it is "an evil way," meaning that it is an evil way that leads to the corruption of every aspect of the society as it unties social ties, disturbs social order, and causes the destruction of humanity. He has threatened those who commit it with much emphasis when He describes the believers as follows: *And (who) do not commit adultery and he who does this shall find a requital of sin; The punishment shall be doubled to him on the day of resurrection, and he shall abide therein in abasement; Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed* (25:68-70).

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1 There is only verse 6:151 that also talks about the same issue as the current verse, and with very similar wording. (Trans.)

The Prohibition of Adultery: A Qur'anic & Sociological Discussion

It is clear that every mature and healthy human being, whether male or female, has an instinctive attraction to the opposite gender. This natural instinct is not exclusive to the humankind, but we find it in all animals in general.

Furthermore, each gender is equipped with certain organs and faculties that facilitate this inclination and attraction. Upon further contemplation about these organs and faculties, it becomes evident that this natural attraction is an inherent means to reproduction and procreation, which ensure the subsistence of the species. The species are also equipped with other aspects that contribute to this natural objective, such as the instinctive love for one's child, as well as the equipment of females with breasts in order to breastfeed their infants until they can eat, chew and digest solid food. All of these are put in service by God in order to ensure the subsistence of the species.

It is for this reason that even though animals are needless of having societies and civilizations [as humans do] due to their simple lives and limited needs, we see that they are nevertheless led to pair up—that is, mate—according to their instinct. Moreover, the parents take it on themselves to look after their offspring, or [at least] the mother takes charge of feeding and raising the baby until it matures and can independently manage its own life.

It is for the same reason that as long as recorded history shows, human beings have always had a custom of marriage which involves an exclusive bond between a man and a woman, in order to satisfy their instincts and produce offspring. The conception of human societies hinges on this natural law. It is known for sure that the different branches of the human race—despite all their multiplicity and variety—trace to small societies called households in ancient times.

Since marriage implies an exclusivity [between man and wife], men have [historically] counted their wives as extensions of themselves. Thus they have taken it on themselves to protect and guard their wives against the intrusion of others, just as they protect themselves, perhaps even more. When this [protective] instinct is stimulated, it is called *ghayrah*

(protective jealousy),[1] which is different from *ḥasad* (envy) or *shuḥ* (miserliness, greed, selfishness).[2]

That is why throughout the course of history marriage has been praised and viewed as a good tradition, while adultery—that is, extramarital sexual intercourse—has been viewed as an evil and reprehensible act. Overall adultery counts as a social sin and an indecency, meaning an evil action that is not openly practiced, although at certain times and under particular circumstances it has existed among free boys and girls or slave girls in some savage tribes, as reported by the histories of some nations and tribes.

What has led the societies to view adultery as an indecency and reprimand it are the consequences that it involves: the corruption of lineages, the cutting of progeny, the appearance of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), its leading to many social crimes like murder, injury, theft, and so on, and the disappearance of chastity, modesty, protective jealousy, kindness and mercy.

However, modern Western civilization is founded on fully enjoying the pleasure of this material life and individual freedom as long as it does not interfere with the law of [the secular] society, irrespective of ethnic, religious and ethical laws. It does not matter what is being done as long as the person is not forced to do it, except for some minor additional conditions in some specific cases. In these societies, individual freedom to act as one wishes and desires takes precedence over the evil consequences of what one does, and social laws are based on the opinion of the majority.

As a result, indecencies have spread among men and women, even to extramarital affairs among married couples and even to incest. It has reached a point where almost no one can be found who is clear of these relationships [in one's lineage]. The number of children born out of

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1 *Ghayrah* (*ghīrah*) means intolerance toward outsiders and intruders (*ghayr*). It involves elements of protectiveness and possessiveness. Hence, *ghayrah* can be translated as "jealousy," and *ghayūr* as "jealous"—in the accurate technical sense of jealousy, which is different from envy (*ḥasad*), as discussed in sociology. (Trans.)

2 *Shuḥ* is a Qur'anic term (4:128, 33:19, 59:9, 64:16) that is often interpreted and translated as *bukhl* (miserliness, stinginess). However, it also involves an element of greed and covetousness. Overall it is being governed by self-interest—in a material sense. Perhaps it can better be translated as "selfish possessiveness." (Trans.)

wedlock has tremendously increased, to the point that they almost outweigh their counterparts. Noble moral virtues like chastity, modesty and protective jealousy that the people used to value and seek by means of marriage have gradually weakened day by day, such that some of them are looked down upon and ridiculed. Had it not been indecent to mention indecencies—especially within a Qur'anic study—I would have quoted some statistics in this regard that have been reported by the press.

According to the Holy Qur'an, the divine religions have taken the strongest stance against adultery, as we discussed in the exposition of verses 6:151-153. Adultery was made unlawful in Judaism, and its unlawfulness can also be inferred from the Gospels.

Likewise it has been prohibited in Islam as one of the major sins, more so in the case of related individuals like one's mother, daughter, sister and aunt, and in the case when a married man or woman fornicates. In addition, a severe penalty has been set for it: 100 lashes for up to two or three times, followed by death for the third or fourth offense [for unmarried individuals], and being stoned to death in the case of married individuals [on the first offense].

God has alluded to the wisdom behind the prohibition of adultery where He says: *And go not nigh to adultery; surely it is an indecency and an evil way* (17:32). First of all, He has counted adultery as "an indecency." Second, He has described it as "evil way," where "way" means—and God knows best—the way of subsistence, as seen in the verse: *What! do you come to the males and cut the way?* (29:29). What he [Lot] is saying here is: You have stopped approaching women which is the way; it is the way to the substance of the human race as it is the means to the birth of children. Moreover, marital bond at the family level it is the strongest instrument that ensures the subsistence of civic societies after their formation.

As the gates of adultery are opened, the people's inclination toward marriage starts decreasing. This is because when there is an easy and convenient way of satisfying one's instinct, what remains for marriage is the duty of covering the living expenses of one's family (*nafaqah*), the trouble of pregnancy and delivery, the hardship of raising children, and the endurance of protecting and providing for the necessities of their lives. This is clearly seen in the state of the young men and women in these [Western] countries. Once one of them [that is, a Western youth] was asked, "Why do you not marry?" He said, "Why should I bother with marriage when all the ladies in this town are mine!?" As a result, what becomes of marriage

is the partnership of two individuals in the minor affairs of life—other than reproduction—like association in business, trade and work: a bond that is severed by the simplest excuse. All of these are plainly visible in Western societies today.

It is for this reason that they count marriage as a partnership that is formed between the man and the wife to have a shared life. This is deemed as an end in itself, as opposed to reproduction, raising children, and satisfying a natural instinct. The latter are viewed as consequences that follow this partnership if both sides agree to it. This is a deviation from the path of creation. An examination of the lives of animals—despite all their varieties—reveals that the desired objective in their mating is the satisfaction of an instinct that has been stimulated and the creation of offspring. Likewise, contemplating mankind's first inclination to this matter reveals that the first [that is, short-term] objective that pulls him toward it is the satisfaction of an instinctive need, followed by the desire to have a child [that is, the long-term objective].

If mankind's incentive for pursuing this natural tradition [of marriage] were to find a partner in life to help him acquire the necessities of life—food, drink, clothes, housing, etc—then perhaps this could be achieved by the partnership of two men or two women. Had that been the case, it should have appeared and become prevalent in human societies or at least in some of them throughout human history. There should have been cases of men marrying men or women marrying women, instead of always having heterosexual marriages.

From another angle, the increase in the number of children born out of wedlock day by day severs the ties of love, compassion and emotional attachment between fathers and children. This emotional detachment between parents and children results in the abandonment of the custom of marriage in the society, which leads to the extinction of that society. The signs of this trend are already visible in Western societies.

It is a misconception to suppose that mankind will someday succeed in spinning the wheel of society by purely mechanical means and scientific ways, without any need to natural instincts. It is claimed that instead of having reproduction based on the parent's love for having kids, people can be given financial and non-financial incentives and bonuses that encourage them to procreate, as it is practised in some countries today. This cannot be sustainable because what supports social institutions and sustains civic laws is their basis on the natural instincts and faculties found in human

beings. Were these instincts and faculties to cease or be made to cease, so would social ties. The structure of a society stands on the individuals, and its institutions hinge on being accepted and adopted by the individuals. Thus, how can a social institution be sustained in long-term when the original nature of individuals does not respond to it and their tastes are averse to it?

Therefore, if human societies go against natural instincts and neglect their primary objectives, humankind will be threatened by extinction. This harbingers a day "when the tears on the patches have widened"[1] even though it is not sensed today because it has not come to full fruition yet.

Another unwanted consequence of this indecency in terms of Islamic law is confusion in lineages, which are a foundation for the laws of marriage and inheritance.

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لِوَلِيِّهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يُسْرِفْ فِي الْقَتْلِ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا ﴿٣٣﴾

(17:33) ***And do not kill any one*** **(al-nafs)** ***whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause, and whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying; surely he is aided.***

The verse forbids the killing of an innocent soul. Except for a just cause refers to cases where the killing is for a just cause, such as cases of murder, apostasy or other acts that have been outlined in the shariah. The verse describes any one [that is, any soul, *al-nafs*] as whom Allah has forbidden, without any qualification [of being Muslim or monotheist]. This could allude to the prohibition of killing any human being in all divine codes of law. Hence, it is a universal law that is found in all religions, as discussed in the exposition of verses 6:151-153.

…and whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying; surely he is

1 This is an expression for when a problem became so exasperated that there is little prospect for its solution. (Trans.)

aided: What is meant by giving authority to his heir is that he is given legal authority to kill the murderer in retaliation. Being aided also refers to this legal authority. The pronouns "him" in "let him not exceed" and "he" in "surely he is aided" refer to the heir.

The implied meaning is: Whoever is slain unjustly, We have given legal authority to his heir—who is a guardian (*walī*) over his blood—to either retaliate, take blood-money, or pardon. Thus the heir should not exceed in slaying by either slaying someone other than the murderer, or slaying more than one person. He should not exceed in slaying because he is aided, so he will not miss the murderer. Or alternatively, being [legally] aided by Us should not cause him to exceed in slaying.

Some exegetes have said that perhaps the pronoun "him" in "let him not exceed" refers to the murderer, implied by the context, and the pronoun "he" in "he is aided" refers to "whoever is slain." The implied meaning would then be: Since We have given authority to the heir of one who is slain unjustly, one should not exceed the just limits in the first place by killing someone unjustly, because whoever is slain unjustly is aided by Us through the authority that We have given to his heir. This meaning is unlikely given the context and flow of the verse, especially as it refers the pronoun "he" [in "he is aided"] to "whoever is slain."

A discussion of retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*) was presented under verse 2:179 (*And there is life for you in (the law of) retaliation*) in volume 1 [volume 2 of the English translation].

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ ۚ وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ ۖ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا ﴿٣٤﴾

(17:34) ***And draw not near to the property of the orphan except in a goodly way till he attains his maturity and fulfill the promise; surely (every) promise shall be questioned [about].***

This verse forbids devouring the property of the orphans, which is a major sin that God has threatened by fire: *(As for) those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, surely they only swallow fire into their bellies and they shall enter burning fire* (4:10). Commanding against [even] drawing near something is a way of emphasizing the prohibition. *"Except in a goodly way"* means in a manner that is best and is constructive to the growth of their property. *"Till he attains his maturity"* means the time of

reaching puberty and becoming an adult, whereby the title "orphan" does not apply to the person anymore. Saying "till he attains his maturity" shows that what is meant by the prohibition (draw not near to the property of the orphan) is a command to protect and preserve their property. It is as if the verse is saying: Preserve their property until they mature and then return it to them. In other words, the verse is effectively saying: Do not approach the property of the orphan as long as he is an orphan. Some relevant discussions on this topic were presented under verse 6:152.

…and fulfill the promise; surely (every) promise shall be questioned [about]: What is meant by being questioned is being questioned about, where "about" has been omitted as an instance of common omission [of something that is understood] in speech. Some have said that what is meant is that promise will actually be questioned itself, because it is possible that the actions will be embodied on the Day of Resurrection and they testify for or against people, intercede for them or oppose them.

وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ إِذَا كِلْتُمْ وَزِنُوا بِالْقِسْطَاسِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٣٥﴾

(17:35) ***And give full measure when you measure out, and weigh with a true balance* (qisṭās)*; this is fair and better in the end.***

Qisṭās means scale. Some have said that it is an Arabicized Roman term. Others have said that the term is originally Arabic. It has been said that the root of the word is composed of qisṭ, meaning justice, and ṭās, meaning the pan of a scale. "A true balance" is a scale that is just and does not underestimate the weights.

…this is fair* (khayr) *and better in the end* (taʾwīlan)*: *Khayr* is that which one would choose (*yakhtāruhu*) when confronted with a decision to choose between it and something else. *Taʾwīl* is the end result upon which an affair settles. Giving full measure and weighing with a true balance are *khayr* (fair and good, or fairer and better) because they prevent one from stealing and robbing the people's property while they are unaware, and they also attract the people's trust.

They are also better in the end because they empower people to lead their economic lives on the basis of integrity and rectitude. People's economic lives depend on enjoying commodities based on two principles: 1. obtaining proper and useful commodities; and 2. exchanging what is

beyond one's need for what one needs. People manage their lives according to how much they can spend in terms of money or goods, and how much of other goods they need to purchase. Now, if they incur a loss due to fraud, improper measure or unjust balance, it damages both aspects of their lives, and trust and security will fade away among them.

On the other hand, if they observe just measures, they will live in rectitude and their economic conditions will improve because their calculations of their livelihoods will be correct. Furthermore, this will develop trust between the people and the merchants and a sense of security will prevail among them.

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۚ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا ﴿٣٦﴾

(17:36) ***And follow not*** **(lā taqfu)** ***that of which you have not any knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.***

Taqfu is from the root *qafā yaqfū*, which means to follow. The rhyme of a poem is called *qāfiya*—from the same root—because it is at the end of the line, following what was before it. The word has also been recited as *taquf*, from the root *qāfa*, which has the same meaning as *qāfa* (to follow). It has been narrated from some lexicologists that *qāfa* has been altered from *qafā*, just as *jabadha* is an altered form of *jadhaba* (lit. "to absorb"). *Qiyāfa* is from this root and it means tracing and following the footprints of something.

The verse forbids one from following what one does know. Given the unconditional form of the verse it includes every form of such following, whether in beliefs or practice. It effectively includes all of the following: Do not believe that of which you have not any knowledge; do not say that of which you have not any knowledge; do not do that of which you have not any knowledge—because all of these involve a form of adherence.

This confirms the command of our primordial human nature (*fiṭra*) that one must follow knowledge and should not follow anything else. Mankind, based on his innate nature and makeup, wants his beliefs and actions in life to be according to the reality and hit the fact of the matter as is. This is the case of things that one has knowledge of (sing. *maʿlūm*), but it does not apply to things that one doubts or suspects. Contemplate this!

A human with a sound *fiṭra* follows, in terms of his beliefs, what he finds to be true and actual in the external world and follows, in terms of his actions, what he deems to be right. This is the rule of human nature concerning things that one can have knowledge of. As with things that one cannot easily have knowledge of—such as the details of religious beliefs for some people, and most religious injunctions for most of the people—then the rule of human nature is that one should follow the knowledge of one who is knowledgeable and an expert of it. But this act of following is because of the follower's knowledge that the person has the right knowledge and expertise. Hence, it reduces again to following one's knowledge, which in this case is knowledge of someone else's knowledge and expertise. This is like a traveler who does not know the directions resorting to a guide—based on the traveler's knowledge that the guide has the knowledge and information. Likewise is the case of a patient who refers to a doctor and anyone else who refers to a specialist or technician to take care of his specific need.

Based on the above, one never fails to follow knowledge throughout his life, for one's innate nature dictates so. Except that sometimes one assumes things that satisfy his soul and pacify his heart to be knowledge, even though they are devoid of the certainty that is called knowledge as in the technique of demonstration (*burhān*) in logic.

It follows that in any matter that one encounters, he either has knowledge of that matter himself, or he has a knowledge-based proof to know what he must do with regard to it. This is what the statement "follow not that of which you have not any knowledge" should be interpreted as. Hence, in cases when one's knowledge-based proof commands him to follow a speculation that is also a following of knowledge just like any other case of following knowledge.

The verse is effectively saying: In cases where one can acquire knowledge about, it is forbidden to jump into adopting a belief or practice except after acquiring that knowledge. And in cases where one cannot acquire knowledge about, it is forbidden to jump into adopting a belief or practice unless one has knowledge to a proof that justifies that belief or action. The latter would be like accepting and following the religious laws that the prophet gives, and obeying him in what he commands or prohibits on behalf of his Lord. Likewise is the case of a patient who takes what a doctor prescribes, and the case of any other skill and speciality. Knowledge to the infallibility of a prophet is binding proof that what he informs

complies with the facts, and his commands and prohibitions conform to the reality. It is binding proof that one must follow these injunctions in order to hit the truth. Likewise, knowledge to the specialty of a doctor and the expertise of an expert is binding proof that one who refers to them is doing the right thing.

So the verse is saying that what one does in practice should ultimately boil down to some knowledge and proof. If we say that the verse only sanctions following that of which one has direct knowledge, then it would negate itself to begin with. The reason is that we understand what the verse is saying through the apparent meaning of the text. But the apparent meaning of a text is only presumptive evidence. However, is it a binding proof that is based on knowledge: The established practice of rational individuals that take the apparent meaning of a text as a proof. If this rational rule is to be considered as that of which you have not any knowledge, then following the apparent meaning of a text—including the apparent meaning of this very verse—would have to be forbidden. Thus, the verse would be commanding against following itself, which means that it would contradict itself.

This should answer the question that some exegetes have raised. For example, Rāzī says in his *Tafsīr* that following speculation is very common in the branches of religion [that is, laws and rituals]. Excepting these from the universal sense of the verse reduces the verse to a rule that is presumptive itself [in terms of its applications]. So if the verse is saying that one cannot follow things that are presumptive, then it would be commanding against following itself. If the verse were to be a binding proof for this, then it would be negating itself, which is not acceptable.[1]

The problem with this view is that the verse undoubtedly prohibits following anything other than certain knowledge. However, we have binding proof based on knowledge for cases where one must act according to presumptive evidence. Hence, such action is in fact following those binding proofs, which means that the verse retains its universality without any exception. Under this premise, [what was considered as] acting on the basis of a specific application of the universal rule [, as if by exception,] in some cases is actually not an exception to the rule at all because

1 Rāzī's point here is that the verse cannot be ruling out the following of presumptive and speculative evidence because this very interpretation of the verse is presumptive and speculative itself. (Trans.)

it is sourced in binding rational proof [that is grounded in knowledge]. This is equivalent to acting on the basis of applying a universal rule that has not been excepted.[1]

Similarly problematic is believing that one understands what the verse is saying only through its apparent meaning [that is, to the apparent universal meaning of the verse]. So if the real meaning of the verse is that it is forbidden to follow anything other than certain knowledge, then the verse would be forbidding the acceptance of its own apparent meaning, and this entails the prohibition of acting according to this very verse.

The answers to this objection, as we already said above, is that following the apparent meaning of a text is a binding proof, as agreed upon by rational individuals. Therefore it should not be considered as an instance of following that of which one does not have certain knowledge.[2]

…surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all* (kullu) *of these* (ūlāʾika)*, shall be questioned about that* (ʿanhu)*: This is a justification for the prohibition at the beginning of the verse where it says: *And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge.*

What primarily comes to mind is that the "these" and "that" [in all of these, shall be questioned about that] refer to "all." Therefore, as al-Zamakhsharī has said in *al-Kashshāf*, "about that" is the subject of "shall be questioned" or a replacing clause for the subject. *Ūlāʾika* (lit. "these") is a demonstrative that is used for intelligible beings. Here it refers to "the hearing and the sight and the heart." They are referred to by such a demonstrative because the verse is talking about their being questioned, which is a feature of intelligible beings. The likes of such usage are frequent in the Book of God.

Some exegetes have denied that *ūlāʾika* is exclusively used for intelligible beings and they have drawn on the following line of Jarīr:

The stops after Lawā were never okay;

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1 In other words, having exceptions does not render the verse presumptive—and thus useless—with regard to its applications, unlike what Rāzī has claimed. (Trans.)

2 In support of the author's view, the verse literally says: *And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge*. *ʿIlmun* is in the indefinite form, which means any knowledge. Therefore, the verse is saying: Do not follow things of which you have no knowledge whatsoever, but it does not prohibit following matters of which one has some knowledge. (Trans.)

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And life was bitter after those (*ūlāʾika*) days.

At any rate, one's very hearing, sight and heart will be literally questioned each, and they will testify for or against the person as God says: *Their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness of what they earned* (36:65).

Some exegetes have favored the view that while "that" (*ʿanhu*) refers to "all" (*kullu*) [that is, to hearing, sight and heart], the rest of the pronouns refer to the person who follows that of which he has not any knowledge. Hence, it is the person who will be questioned about his hearing, sight and heart, as how and in what way he used them. The problem with this interpretation is that the verse involves a shift from the second person [at the beginning] to the third person [at the end]. If this meaning were to be true, then the verse should have said: "You shall be questioned about that." Not to mention that it is an unlikely possibility.

The implied meaning is: Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge, because surely God will soon ask one's hearing, sight and heart—which are the instruments that one uses to acquire knowledge. The effective meaning implied by this justification based on the context is: The hearing, the sight and the heart are God's blessings upon mankind so that they may identify and acquire the truth, so that they may believe in it and act according to it. Each of them will soon be asked whether or not it was used to acquire knowledge, and whether or not the person followed the knowledge acquired by that instrument.

The hearing will be asked: Did you pursue sure and definitive knowledge in your hearing? The sight will be asked: Did you pursue what is evident and patent in your seeing? The heart will be asked: Did you pursue what is certain and doubtless in your thinking and judgment? And of course they will surely tell the truth and testify according to the fact of the matter. Thus, it is incumbent upon one to avoid following what he has no knowledge of, because his organs that were his instruments of acquisition of knowledge will certainly be asked. They will testify against him about what he did based on some uncertain knowledge that he acquired through them, and that point no excuse will be accepted.

This effectively reduces to the following: Do not follow that of which you have not any knowledge, for it will be recorded against you in your hearing, your sight and your heart, and God will certainly ask them about your course of action. Hence, the verse is equivalent to verses about the testimony of body parts such as the following: *Until when they come to it,*

their ears and their eyes and their skins shall bear witness against them as to what they did… And you did not veil yourselves lest your ears and your eyes and your skins should bear witness against you, but you thought that Allah did not know most of what you did. And that was your (evil) thought which you entertained about your Lord that has tumbled you down into perdition, so are you become of the lost ones (41:20-23).

The difference is that this verse also includes the heart as one of the witnesses over the person. The heart [in the Qur'an] means the faculty of understanding and comprehension. This is one of the most astounding points that is deduced from the verses about the Resurrection: That God will raise the human soul and question it about what it understood, whereby the very soul of a person will testify against him.

It is thus clear that the verse forbids adopting anything out of ignorance, whether that is believing something that one does not know to be correct, or doing something that one does not know to be permissible and desirable, or acting on a matter that is not known for sure. Then the subsequent part of the verse justifies this prohibition by saying that He will question the hearing, the sight and the heart. There is no problem in the reason being more general than what it has justified in this verse, for the questioning of organs also applies to cases where one does an action despite knowing for sure that it is impermissible. He says: *On that day We will set a seal upon their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness…* (36:65).

Concerning the first part of the verse (*And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge*) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says:

> It means: Do not say, "I heard" while you have not heard; do not say, "I saw" while you have not seen; and do not say, "I know" while you do not know. This is how Ibn ᶜAbbās and Qatādah have interpreted it.
>
> It has also been said that it means: Do not backbite others.[1] That is, when one is not present with you, do not backbite him. This is how al-Ḥasan has interpreted it.
>
> It has also been said: It is about false witness. This is how Muḥammad b. Ḥanafiyyah has interpreted it.

1 It literally says, "Do not speak behind others," where the word for behind is *qafā*, from the same root as *lā taqfu*: do not follow. In other words: Do not trail behind the people, talking about them in their absence. (Trans.)

> The truth is that the verse is universal and it includes every speech, act or decision that is not based on knowledge. It is as if God is saying: Do not say that which you do not know to be permissible to say; do not do that which you do not know to be permissible to do; and do not believe that which you do not know to be permissible to believe.

The problem with this is that it is more general than what the verse is saying. The verse is saying, "Do not follow if you do not have knowledge [to the admissibility of something]"; it is not saying, "Do not follow unless you have knowledge [to the admissibility of something]." The latter is more inclusive than the former. What the former is saying is: "If you are ignorant about a belief or action, then do not pursue it." The latter includes this, but it also includes cases when one has knowledge to the impermissibility of something.[1]

As with the interpretations that he has narrated [from Ibn ʿAbbās and others], it is more befitting to consider them as applications and examples for the justification part [at the end of the verse] instead of interpretations for the first part of the verse.

وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا ۖ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَخْرِقَ الْأَرْضَ وَلَنْ تَبْلُغَ الْجِبَالَ طُولًا ﴿٣٧﴾

(17:37) ***And do not walk in the land exultingly* (maraḥan)*, for you cannot cut through the earth nor reach the mountains in height.***

Maraḥ has been defined as intense and invalid joy. Perhaps its qualification as invalid (*bāṭil*) is because of its transgression of balanced limits. Valid joy is when one is cheerful with a blessing of God, grateful for it, and observant of balanced limits. If the person's joy intensifies to the point that it weakens his intellect and its signs appear in his actions, speech, standing, sitting and particularly in his walking, then it is an invalid and wrongful joy.

And do not go about (lā tamshi) in the land exultingly…: This forbids one from having a higher regard for himself than what he really is, due to vainglory, insolence, pride and conceit. The verse specifically talks about

1 Of course this should also be avoided, but the point is that this extra prohibition cannot be deduced from the verse, even though it is a valid prohibition in its own right. (Trans.)

"walking" (*lā tamshi*) because this sense of pride has a special manifestation in the way one walks about.

…for you cannot cut through the earth nor reach the mountains in height: This is a metaphorical expression. It is saying that your arrogant behavior, by which you wish to show your power, authority and greatness, is only an illusion in your imagination. Otherwise, there is the earth which is stronger than you and which is not cut by your steps, and there are the mountains which are taller than you. So admit this fact that you are a low and abject being. And so is the case of everything that mankind seek and cherish in this world, including property, honor, dominion, power, supremacy, wealth, and so on: they are all illusive matters without any reality beyond the human mind. However, God has formed our souls in a way that we recognize these [illusory] matters and set them as basis in our activities so that this world may be built and God's decree may be fulfilled. Had it not been for these illusions, mankind could not live in this world, and God's will would not be fulfilled, where He said: *There is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time* (2:36).

كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ كَانَ سَيِّئُهُ عِندَ رَبِّكَ مَكْرُوهًا ﴿٣٨﴾

(17:38) ***All this—the evil of it*** **(sayyiʾuhu)***—is hateful in the sight of your Lord.*

As the exegetes have said, this verse refers to all of the preceding commands and prohibitions, which are also the object of reference for the pronoun "it" (in the evil of it). The implied meaning is: The evil things—that is, things that are forbidden—among all that was mentioned above are hateful in the sight of your Lord, meaning that God is not pleased with them and does not approve of them.

An uncommon recitation reads *sayyiʾatan* (instead of *sayyiʾuhu*) as the predicate of the verb "is" in the verse. The meaning in this case is clear.[1]

ذَٰلِكَ مِمَّا أَوْحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ الْحِكْمَةِ ۗ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا آخَرَ فَتُلْقَىٰ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ﴿٣٩﴾

1 The meaning in this case is: All of the above are evil (*sayyiʾatan*) and hateful in the sight of your Lord. (Trans.)

(17:39) ***This is of what your Lord has revealed to you of wisdom, and do not associate any other god with Allah lest you should be thrown into hell, blamed, cast away.***

"This" refers to all the detailed prescriptions above. The verse involves applying the word "wisdom" for legal injunctions (which are the branches of religion). Their description as wisdom could be on the account of their expediencies, which can be inferred from the above verses in brief.

…and do not associate any other god with Allah lest you should be thrown into hell, blamed, cast away: Here again God forbids associating others with Him even though He already did so above.[1] This repetition is to show the significance of monotheism and the importance of this order. It also serves as a bond that links the beginning of the discussion with its end. The meaning of the verse is clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) In a narration where Imam al-Riḍā discusses *jabr* (determinism, compulsion), *tafwīḍ* (entrustment, delegation) and *al-amr bayn al-amrayn* (the intermediate position between the two), the narrator says: I asked him, "Does God have any will and wish with regards to that; that is, with regards to the acts of a servant?" He said: "As with acts of obedience, God's will and wish is that He commands them, is pleased with them, and helps their doers. But as with acts of disobedience, He forbids them, is displeased with them, and leaves their doers on their own…"[2]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq was once asked about God's words, *"And goodness to your parents"* (17:23). He said: Doing good means being a good company for them and not making them [explicitly] ask you what they need, even if they are wealthy. Is it not that God says: *By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love* (3:92)*?*

The Imam continued: As with His words, *"If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them (so much as) Ugh"* (17:23), you should not say to them [even] "ugh" they frustrate you, and you should not chide them [even] if they beat you. *"And speak to*

1 See verses 22-23 above. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, on the authority of Burayd b. ʿUmayr b. Muʿāwiyah al-Shāmī.

them a gracious word" (17:23): It is to tell them, "God bless you!" This is what "gracious word" means.

The Imam then recited : *"And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion*" (17:24): Do not fix your eyes on them except by compassion and geniality. Do not raise your voice above theirs, nor raise your hand above theirs, and do not walk in front of them.[1]

Author's comment: Kulaynī has also narrated this in *al-Kāfī*, via his chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Wallād al-Ḥannāṭ, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The lowest stage of filial undutifulness (*uqūq*) [toward one's parents] is [to say] "ugh." Had God known[2] something subtler than it, He would have forbidden that.[3]

Author's comment: *Al-Kāfī* has narrated this via another chain of narration as well. Narrations to this effect have also been reported in *al-Kāfī*: via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Bilād, from Imam al-Ṣādiq; in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ḥarīz, from Imam al-Ṣādiq; and in Ṭabrisī's *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his father, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

There are countless narrations reported by Sunnis and Shias from the Prophet and the Imams saying that it is obligatory to do good to one's parents and forbidden to be undutiful to them, whether they are alive or dead.

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Awwāb* [*"those who turn (to Him) frequently"* in 17:25] means one who repents, worships and ceases to sin.[4]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq told Abū Baṣīr: "O Abā Muḥammad, incumbent upon you is abstinence [from God's disobedience], diligence [in His obedience], fulfilment of the trust, honesty of speech, keeping good company of anyone who accompanies you, and prolongation of prostration. These have been the customs of those who repent and return (*al-tawwābīn al-awwābīn*)." Abū Baṣīr then said: "'Those who turn (to Him) frequently' (awwābūn) means

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū Wallād al-Ḥannāṭ.

2 "Had God known" is a way of emphasizing the non-existence of something, for God knows everything. In other words, it means "Had there been" (Trans.)

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥadīd b. Ḥakīm.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

'those who repent frequently' (*tawwābūn*)."[1]

Author's comment: Concerning this verse (17:25), it has also been narrated from Abū Baṣīr, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, that "those who turn (to Him) frequently" are those who repent frequently and are constantly in worship.

(6) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said : "When the shadows disappear and the souls take a rest,[2] then take your needs to God, for that is the hour of *awwābīn*." He then recited: *Then He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him) frequently* (17:25).[3]

(7) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn told a man from Syria, "Have you read the Qur'an?" "Of course," he said. The Imam asked him, "Have you not read in [Chapter] Banī Isrāʾīl: *And give to the near of kin his due* [17:26]?" The man said, "Are you the near of kin that God has ordered to be given their due?" The Imam said, "Indeed."[4]

Author's comment: *Tafsīr al-burhān* has also narrated this, on the authority of Ṣadūq, via his chain of narration, from the Imam, and also on the authority of Thaʿlabī's *Tafsīr*, on the authority of al-Suddī, on the authority of Ibn al-Daylamī, from the Imam.

(8) ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about His words: *And do not squander wastefully* (17:26). He said: If one spends anything not in the way of God's obedience, then he is a squanderer; and if one spends in the way of good, then he is moderate spender[5] (*muqtaṣid*).[6]

(9) Concerning the same verse (*do not squander wastefully*; 17:26), Imam al-Ṣādiq said to Abū Baṣīr: It is about a person who gives away all of his wealth and then sits hapless without any finances.

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 The text says, *mālat al-afyāʾ* ("when the shadows incline") but in some narrations it says, *zālat al-afyāʾ* ("when the shadows disappear"). Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 90:348. Given the subsequent part ("the souls take a rest") the hadith is talking about the noon time, when the shadows of objects are minimized and when many people used to rest in those lands with extreme heat at noon (see 24:58). (Trans.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah and Hannād.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Ḥarīz.

5 What this hadith is saying is that it is not about the amount that is spent, but the cause. (Trans.)

6 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

ʿAbū Baṣīr asked: "So there can be squander in lawful expenditures?" The Imam replied: "Yes."[1]

(10) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Maḥsūr* ["stripped off" in 17:29] means naked.[2]

(11) ʿAjlān said: I was with Imam al-Ṣādiq when a beggar came to him. The Imam took a handful from a basket of dates there and gave it to him. Then another beggar came and the Imam did the same thing. Then a third one came but the Imam told him, "May God provide for us and for you."

The Imam then said [to me]: "The Messenger of God was such that if anyone asked him for anything of this world he would grant his request. One day a lady sent her son to him saying, 'Go and ask him [for some help]. If he says that "we have nothing here" then tell him: Give me your shirt!' So the Prophet took off his shirt and threw it toward him [from behind the door]." In another narration the Imam said: "He gave him his shirt." The Imam continued: "God then corrected him by ordering him to moderation, where He said: *And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth, lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off* (maḥsūran, from iḥsār) (17:29), where *iḥsār* means need."[3]

Author's comment: ʿAyyāshī has also narrated this in his *Tafsīr*. The story has also been narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*; also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of al-Minhāl b. ʿAmr, and on the authority of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: [In this verse] God is teaching His prophet how to give charity. The story is that he had an *awqiyyah*[4] of gold with him and he did not want to sleep with it in his hand, so he gave it in charity. Thus he did not have anything the next

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

4 An *awqiyyah* is a unit of weight equivalent to seven *mithqāls* (around 30 grams in total). (Trans.)

morning to give to a beggar that came asking for help. The beggar reproached him for this, and the Prophet was grieved because of not having anything, for indeed he was very compassionate and gracious. Thus God corrected His prophet by His command: *And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth, lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off* (17:29). He is saying that sometimes people ask you for help and they do not accept any excuse. So if you were to give away all of the money that you have then you would be stripped of money.[1]

(13) Imam al-Ṣādiq held his fist tight and said: "This is what is meant by *And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck* (17:29)." He then opened up his palm and said: "This is what is meant by *nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth* (17:29)."[2]

(14) Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "What does *imlāq* [in 17:31] mean?" He said, "It means *iflās* (insolvency)."[3]

(15) Concerning verse 17:32 (*And go not nigh to adultery; surely it is an indecency*) the Messenger of God said: "A servant does not fornicate while being a believer, does not slander while being a believer, does not steal while being a believer, does not drink wine while being a believer, and does not breach [a contract or trust] while being a believer." He was asked, "O Messenger of God! By God we used to think that it is possible for one to commit these things and be a believer." The Messenger of God replied, "When he does any of these things, faith exits his heart. Then if he repents, God will return to Him [with forgiveness]."[4]

Author's comment: This hadith has also been narrated via other chains on the authority of ʿĀʾishah and Abū Hurayrah. In the narrations of Ahl al-Bayt it says that the spirit of faith will depart him upon committing these acts.

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ṣadaqah.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ibn Sinān

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Qatādah, on the authority of al-Ḥasan.

(16) Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār said: I told Abū al-Ḥasan [that is, Imam al-Kāẓim], "Indeed God says in His Book: *And whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying; surely he is aided* (17:33). What is this 'exceeding' that God has prohibited here?" He said: "He has prohibited killing anyone other than the murderer, as well as mutilating the murderer (*muthlah*)." I asked, "And what does it mean that surely he is aided?" He replied, "Is there a bigger aid than handing the murderer to the victim's heirs [that is, his family] so that they may kill him, without any consequence for this killing in the religion or in this world."[1]

(17) Abū al-ʿAbbās said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about two men that kill one man. He said: "His heir has the choice to kill either of the two murderers, whereby the other one would owe half of his blood money—I mean half of the killed murderer's blood money— to his children. Likewise, if a man kills a woman and her heirs agree to take the blood money of a woman from him, then that is settled. But if they insist on killing the murderer, then they can do so but they will owe [his family] half of a man's blood money.[2] This is what God says: *We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying* (17:33).[3]

Author's comment: There are other narrations to the effect of the last two narrations.

(18) Zayd b. Aslam said: In the pre-Islamic era "Age of Ignorance" (*al-jāhilyyah*), when a man of a tribe was killed by someone, his tribe would not be appeased unless they killed a man of nobility from the other tribe. So if the murderer was not a nobleman, they would kill someone else instead of him. Thus they were admonished by God: *And do not kill… so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying* (17:33).[4]

(19) Concerning verse 17:35 (*weigh with a true balance*) Imam al-Bāqir said: A true balance (*al-qisṭās al-mustaqīm*) is a scale with an

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 Male blood money is twice as much as female blood money. See 2:178. (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*.

indicator (lit. tongue).[1]

Author's comment: The Imam has mentioned the indicator to indicate justness, because scales with two pans [and tongues] are like this.

(20) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Indeed God has made faith obligatory on the organs of the children of Adam. He has divided it over them such that each organ has been assigned a share of faith that is different than that of the other organs. These include the two eyes by which one sees, and the two legs by which one walks.

He has made it obligatory on the eye to not look on what God has made unlawful for the person, but to lower its gaze from what God has prohibited for it. This is the action of the eye and it is a part of faith. God says: *And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that* (17:36). This is what has been made obligatory in terms of lowering the gaze from what God has made unlawful. This is the action of the eye and it is a part of faith.

He has made it obligatory on the legs to not walk toward any act of disobedience of God, but to walk toward what God has made obligatory. He says: *And do not walk in the land exultingly, for you cannot cut through the earth nor reach the mountains in height* (17:37), and: *And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice; surely the most hateful of voices is braying of the asses* (31:19).[2]

Author's comment: This is also reported in *al-Kāfī* as a part of a lengthy tradition, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

(21) Abū Jaʿfar said:[3] I was once with Imam al-Ṣādiq when a man told him, "May my parents be sacrificed for you! I have some neighbors that have maids that sing and play lute (*ʿūd*). Sometimes when I go to the washroom [at the other side of my yard] I keep sitting there for longer to listen to them." The Imam said, "Do not do this." The man said, "By God I do not go to them; it is only that

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī.

3 This is apparently a mistake in transcription. It should be Abū Baṣīr, as recorded by Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 6:34. (Trans.)

my ears hear them." The Imam told him, "Have you not heard God saying: *Surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that* [17:36]?" He replied, "You are right! By God, it is as if I had not heard this verse of God's Book so far, neither from an Arab nor from a non-Arab. I will certainly not do this again, by the will of God, and indeed I ask God for forgiveness." The Imam said, "Now get up, take a bath (*ghusl*), and perform [as many] prayers as you can, for indeed you had a terrible habit. How bad would it have been were you to die at that state. Give thanks to God and ask Him forgiveness for all that He dislikes, because indeed He does not dislike except that which is evil. Leave the evil for its people, for indeed every act has its own people."

Author's comment: Shaykh [al-Ṭūsī] has narrated this in *al-Tahdhīb* from the Imam, and al-Kulaynī has narrated it in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ziyād, from the Imam.[1]

(22) Concerning verse 17:36 (*surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The hearing [or the ear] will be asked about what it heard; the sight [or the eye] will be asked about what it saw; and the heart will be asked about what it believed.[2]

(23) Concerning verse 17:36 (*And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge*) one of the Infallibles said: Do not accuse anyone by what you have no knowledge of. The Messenger of God said, "One who accuses a [chaste] believing man or woman will be held in *ṭīnat khabāl* until he is acquitted of what he has said."[3]

Author's comment: According to a narration in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr, Imam al-Ṣādiq defined *ṭīnat khabāl* as pus exiting the private parts of unchaste women. A similar interpretation has also been narrated in Sunni sources from the Prophet, on the authority of Abū Dharr and Anas.

As you can see, some of the above narrations relate to the specific case mentioned in a verse, while others relate to the general reasoning and justification behind the verse, as we discussed above.

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

Verses 40-55

These verses continue the topic of monotheism. They rebuke the polytheists for assuming idols, describing the noble angels as females, and not taking heed by the proofs of monotheism provided for them in the Qur'an. Among other things the verses talk about how the polytheists do not understand the Qur'an but instead mock the Prophet and the idea of resurrection, and utter profanities concerning God.

Commentary

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا ۚ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

(17:40) ***What! has then your Lord preferred to give you*** **(aṣfākum, from iṣfā')** ***sons, and (for Himself) taken females*** **(ināthan)** ***from among the angels? Most surely you utter a grievous saying.***

Iṣfā' means to choose and single something out (*ikhlās*). *Majma' al-bayān* says, "When you select someone over others to be given something you would say: I *iṣfaytu* so-an-so by this thing."

This verse addresses those who used to hold that all or some of the angels are God's daughters. The question in the verse is a rhetorical one, implying a negation. Perhaps the reason why the verse says "females" (*ināthan*) instead of daughters (*banāt*) is that they [the audience] used to count femininity [in general, not particularly being a daughter] as an abject quality.

The implied meaning is: Given that He is your Lord and not the Lord of others, and given that He is the One Who is in charge of everything, how can you say that He has preferred you by an honor by which He has not honored even Himself? And that is preferring you by sons while He has only assumed female children for Himself; that is, the noble angels that you suppose to be females. Most surely you utter a grievous saying that will solicit evil consequences.

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِيَذَّكَّرُوا وَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا نُفُورًا ﴿٤١﴾

(17:41) *And certainly We have repeated (warnings)* (ṣarrafnā, from taṣrīf) *in this Qur'an that they may be mindful, but it does not add save to their aversion* (nufūran, from nafr).

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Ṣarf* is to turn something from one state to another, or to turn it into something else. *Taṣrīf* means the same, with an element of abundance and multitude. It is used the most when talking about changing something from one condition to another, or from one affair to another. *Taṣrīf* of winds means moving them from one state to another. He says: *And We repeated [or expressed in different ways] the communications* (46:27); *and We have distinctly set forth therein of threats [in various forms]* (20:113). Other examples are *taṣrīf al-kalām* [that is, expressing something in different ways and words] and *taṣrīf al-darāhim* [that is, exchange of money].

It also says:

> *Nafr* means being disposed away from something and toward something else—much like *faza*ʿ, which is turning away from something in fear and turning toward something else instead. It is used as: *nafara* ʿ*an al-shay*ʾ*i nufūran*. He says: *It increased them in naught but aversion* (35:42); *But it does not add save to their aversion* (17:41).

What is meant based on the context is: I swear that in this Qur'an We have indeed repeated Our speech with them about the truth of monotheism and the falsity of polytheism through several arguments, and We have shifted from one tone to another. We have presented Our speech in different expressions and We have made it clear by many elaborations so that they may take heed and the truth may become clear to them.

…but it does not add save to their aversion: It means: These repetitions only added to their aversion. Whenever a new expression came to them it created a new aversion in them.

The verse involves a shift from the second person to the third person, indicating that they are not worthy of being directly addressed and spoken to due to this attitude of theirs.

*Majma*ʿ *al-bayān* says:

> One may ask: If it is known [to God] that the revelation of Qur'an

only increases their aversion, then what is the point of its revelation? What is the wisdom in this?

The answer is: The wisdom is that this completes the proof against them and leaves them no excuse as to the lack of clear arguments that establish their responsibility. Moreover, it benefits and guides a group that would not have been guided in the absence of revelation. Furthermore, if it were not to be revealed, these people who escape from faith would have created an even greater evil than their aversion now. Thus wisdom necessitates the revelation of these teachings. Their aversion to these verses and arguments was because they viewed them as doubts and deceptions, and because they did not ponder over them sufficiently.

His claim that "they would have created an even greater evil than their aversion now" is not correct. This is because the increase of their aversion leads them to denying, opposing and blocking the way of the truth, and there is no greater evil in the propagation of religion than these.

However, it should be noted that even though disbelief, denial, aversion and enmity to the truth harm their doers and lead them to damnation, they benefit those who believe the truth, are satisfied with it, and submit to it. Had there been no opposites for these good traits and beautiful virtues, they would not have been realized [as virtues and values].[1] Contemplate this!

Therefore, wisdom necessitates that proofs should be provided to the point of perfection and beyond perfection. This will bring out the capacity and aptitude of the wretched for wretchedness to the utmost degree. Likewise, the felicitous would rise to various degrees of elevation according to their actions in contrast to the degrees of the wretched. After all, He says: *All do We aid—these as well as those—out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20).

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ مَعَهُ آلِهَةٌ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذًا لَابْتَغَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِي الْعَرْشِ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾

(17:42) *Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of the Throne.*

Here God stops talking to them and directs His address to the Prophet.

1 Or they would not have literally come to their full fruition. (Trans.)

He orders him to talk to them concerning the topic of monotheism and the falsity of polytheism—specifically about their belief that there are gods besides God who direct the affairs in the universe, each at its own level, and that each of them is a lord over its own jurisdiction and area of direction, such as the goddess of the sky, the goddess of the earth, the goddess of war and the goddess of Quraysh.

Being God's partners in the direction of affairs means that each of them has sovereignty (*mulk*) according to its dominion of lordship. However, sovereignty over something is a necessary consequence of its creation [by the sovereign], and God is the only Creator, even according to their own belief.[1] Their claim implies that sovereignty and lordship of the universe is intrinsically capable of being divided and taken up by other than God. But since love for power and dominion is a necessary attribute of every being, each of these gods would have sought to fight with Him for His sovereignty and snatch it away from Him so that he may be the sole king and sovereign, and may take all might and dominion to himself. God is far above this!

The verse's argument in brief is: If there had been gods with Him as they claim, and if it were possible for other than Him to take ownership over anything of His sovereignty—which is a requisite of His Essence from Which everything emanates—then these gods would have sought to get a hold of His sovereignty. This is because the love for dominion and sovereignty is necessarily ingrained in all beings. Thus they would have wanted to bring Him down from His Throne in order to add His sovereignty to theirs, due to their innate love and inclination toward it. However, no one has a way to Him; He is far above that.

…then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of the Throne: That is: They would seek to find a way to Him so that they may overcome Him and snatch His kingdom away from Him. "The Lord of the Throne" specifically describes God's kingdom and dominion. Referring to Him by this attribute is to indicate that their seeking of Him is because He is the Lord of the Throne; they would seek to find a way to His Throne

1 For example, it has been narrated that they used to chant *labbayka* (the first formula in hajj) as follows: "Here I come; there is no partner for You except a partner that is Yours: You own him and what he owns." Likewise, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures are replete with the idea that all sovereignty belongs to God. (Auth.)

so that they may assume it.

This shows the irrelevance of what some exegetes have suggested: that the argument in this verse is similar to the argument in the verse: *If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder* (21:22).

The reason for this irrelevancy between the two arguments is that their premises are different. The argument in the current verse of discussion serves to deny any partners for God by saying that if there were any, they would have sought a way to the Lord of the Throne in order to overcome Him and seize His sovereignty. But the verse in Chapter 21 argues that having multiple gods would lead to different governances in the universe, which would in turn cause disorder and havoc in the world. Hence, the argument in the current verse is different than that of verse 21:22. The latter is similar to the argument in the verse: *In that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others* (23:91).

Likewise is the interpretation of some early exegetes, that what is meant by their seeking a way to the Lord of the Throne is that they would seek proximity and nearness to Him due to His dominance over them. The argument in this case would be: a) Had there been gods besides Him as they claim, those gods would have certainly sought proximity and nearness to Him as they would realize His preeminence and greatness; b) but one who acts like this is not a god; c) hence there are no gods besides Him.

This interpretation is also not applicable because the context of the verse testifies otherwise, as seen in the description of God as "the Lord of the Throne" and the subsequent verse: *Glory be to Him and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say* (17:43). This glorification and exaltation of God shows that the idea of there being other gods that would seek a way to Him involves a terrible consequence that does not befit His precinct of magnificence and grandeur. This consequence could be the idea of His sovereignty being open to others to seek a way to it and attack it, meaning that in and of itself His sovereignty can be transferred to or usurped by others.

سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

(17:43) *Say Glory be to Him and exalted* (taʿālā) *be He in high exaltation above what they say.*

Taʿālā means the utmost degree of exaltation and elevation. That is why the adjective "high" (*kabīran*) has been added to the object *ʿuluww* (exaltation). This effectively means *taʿālā taʿāliyan* (that is, "Be He exalted to the utmost degree of exaltation") .

This verse glorifies God of the polytheist belief that there are other gods besides Him, and that His sovereignty and Lordship are open to dispute and capture by others.

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ۚ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَٰكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا ﴿٤٤﴾

(17:44) ***The seven heavens declare His glory and the earth (too), and those who are in them; and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification; surely He is Forbearing, Forgiving.***

This verse and the one before it serve two purposes: 1. On one hand they glorify and exalt God, much like the verse: *And they say: Allah has taken to himself a son. Glory be to Him* (2:116). 2. They complement the argument in verse 17:42 (*If there were with Him gods as they say…*) by completing the premise. That is because the argument in that verse is an example of *modus tollens* (*qiyās istithnāʾī*),[1] and God's glorification by all beings in this verse denies the consequent in that conditional statement. It is as if it is said: If there were other gods besides Him, then His kingdom would have been prone to contention and attack, but His entire kingdom—including the heavens, the earth and all therein—glorify Him of that and testify that He has no partner in His kingdom. His kingdom originated from no one other than Him, will end in no one other than Him, is kept up by no one other than Him, and prostrates in humility to no one other than Him. Thus, no one other than Him can ever be characterized by sovereignty, and kingdom does not befit anyone other than Him. Therefore there is no Lord other than Him.

It could also be that these two verses (verses 43 and 44: *Glory be to Him*

1 *Qiyās istithnāʾī* includes both *modus ponens* (implication elimination) and *modus tollens* (denying the consequence). In the case of the latter, the argument is: 1) If A, then B. 2) Not B. 3) So not A. In case of the former, the second premise would be A, which changes the conclusion to B. (Trans.)

and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say. The seven heavens declare His glory…) together compose the denial of the consequent in the above argument. The implied meaning is: If there were other gods besides Him, they would have certainly sought to overcome Him and dethrone Him from His kingdom. However, He is glorified of that by His own All-Emanating Essence which upholds everything. A necessary consequence of this [that is, of everything being kept up by Him] is that He cannot ever be divested of His Lordship and it cannot be transferred to anyone else. Likewise, His entire kingdom—which is the realm of heavens, the earth and all therein—glorify Him by their very essences (sing. *dhāt*) that totally depend on Him, such that if their essences are cut off or veiled from Him for the blink of an eye they would vanish and disappear into nonexistence. Thus, there are no gods besides Him, and His kingdom and Lordship cannot ever be sought by others. Contemplate this!

Either way, this verse ascribes glorification to every bit and piece of the visible world as it says: *The seven heavens declare His glory and the earth (too), and those who are in them.* They all glorify God and declare His clearness from the partners that they [the polytheists] ascribe to him.

Glorification (*tasbīḥ*) means to purify something by speech [that is, to state and claim the purity of something verbally], and the essence of speech is the unveiling of what one holds within by some way of conveying it and referring to it. The thing is that since human beings cannot convey all of what they want by virtue of their existential capacity, they have been forced to use words for this matter, and words are certain voices that have been conventionally assigned to certain meanings. People use these words and voices to indicate what they hold within, and this has become the basis of communicating ideas among them. Sometimes people convey their intended message by body language, such as the movement of hands or head, and sometimes they use writings or signs for this purpose.

Overall, anything that serves as a means of conveying an intended message is a speech or word (*qawl, kalām*). Now, if the very constitution of something serves this purpose, then it is speaking and talking by its very nature and constitution, even though it does not emit any sound or utter any words. It is for this reason that the Qur'an has attributed speech, word, command, revelation and the like of these matters to God, because they involve the unveiling of an intended meaning. God has called these speech and words even though they are not speeches and words in the everyday sense of them and as commonly understood by us who are

accustomed to letters and human languages.

The existents that we see such as the sky, the earth and whatever is therein involve a patent unveiling of the unity of their Lord in His Lordship, and His purity from every defect and imperfection. Thus, they all glorify God.

This is because these beings in and of themselves are nothing but absolute need and sheer poverty toward Him, on Whom they depend in their essence, their attributes and their every state. Need is the strongest sign and proof for that which is needed, because the needy cannot subsist without it and cannot be severed from it. Therefore, since all of these beings [in the universe] are essentially deficient and have an existential need, they point to the All-Sufficient Being Who is perfect and complete in its Essence and Who is the Existantiator (*al-Mūjid*) of these beings. Furthermore, the relationship between each of these beings and the other beings that help perfect its existence and fulfill its essential deficiencies shows that its Existentiator is its Lord that controls everything and directs its affairs.

Next is the general system that governs all beings, gathers their dispersions, and links between them. This unified system reveals the unity of its Existentiator. It shows that all things reduce to Him alone, and all needs and deficiencies are fulfilled by Him alone. Hence, there is nothing and no one other than Him that is free from need and exempt from imperfection. He is the Lord, and there is no other lord; He is the All-Sufficient Who has no need; He is the Perfect that is free from every imperfection.

Therefore, every single being in the universe unveils the purity of its Lord from need and His clearness from imperfection by the virtue of its own need and imperfection. Even those who ignorantly attribute partners to their Lord or ascribe any imperfection or defect to Him are in fact establishing His purity from having partners and His clearness from every imperfection by this very act of attribution and ascription of theirs. This is because the meaning that is conceived in the mind of this person, the words that flow on his tongue, and everything that he uses to convey this idea [of polytheism] are all existential matters that, due to their existential needs, point to a Single Lord that has no partner and is free from every imperfection.

An example for how the very denial of such a denier is a confession for what he is denying is a person who claims that there is no one who can speak in the world and verbally testifies to this! His very testimony

is the best proof against what he is claiming and testifying, and the more he repeats and emphasizes his testimony and the more people he takes as witness to it, the stronger will be the proof against it.

You may object: The mere unveiling of the purity of something is not called glorification (*tasbīḥ*) unless it is done with intention, and intention is a component of life, while most of these beings—such as the earth, the heaven and various inanimate objects—lack life. Therefore, the only resolution is to say that glorification in this verse is meant only metaphorically (*majāz*), in the sense that the very existence of these beings indicates the purity of their Lord.

The Book of God suggests that knowledge diffuses through all beings along with the diffusion of creation in them. Each being has a share of knowledge as much as its share of existence. This, however, does not necessitate that all beings have the same degree of knowledge, or that they have the same kind or form of knowledge, or that they are all knowledgeable of what mankind know, or that what they know should be understandable to mankind. God narrates from the organs of mankind: *They shall say: Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak* (41:21). He also says: *He said to it [the heaven] and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly* (41:11). There are many verses to this effect, and by the will of God we shall present a separate discussion on this later on.

Given the above, there is no created being except that it has some level of knowledge by itself. Its very being involves the desire to express and display its needy and deficiency that is fulfilled by the sufficiency and perfection of its One Lord Who has no partner. Thus it glorifies its Lord and declares His purity from every partner and imperfection.

This shows that there is no reason why we should interpret glorification metaphorically as any indication whatsoever, because a metaphorical interpretation can only be used when a literal interpretation is impossible. Likewise is the claim of some exegetes that some of these beings glorify God verbally, such as the angels and believing human beings, while some others glorify Him metaphorically and by their state of being, such as the inanimate objects that show Him by the virtue of their existence. Therefore, glorification in this verse includes both metaphorical and literal. What was just discussed above shows the weakness of this interpretation.

The truth is that the glorification of all beings is literal and spoken, except that being spoken (*qālī*) is not necessarily the same as being verbal

and through sound waves, as we said above. We also had a relevant and insightful discussion on speech (*kalām*) toward the end of the second volume of this book [volume 4 of the English translation].

Hence, when God says, *"The seven heavens declare His glory and the earth (too), and those who are in them,"* it affirms real glorification by the existents which they declare by their very beings and by their relationship with the other existents beings in the universe. They purify their Lord of the partners and aspects of imperfection that the polytheists attribute to Him.

…and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise: This part of the verse extends glorification to everything, because the first part of the verse only mentioned the seven heavens, the earth and those who are in them. It also adds praise (*ḥamd*) to glorification (*tasbīḥ*). Its purport is that just as everything glorifies Him it also praises Him for His beautiful attributes and actions.

Just as every being has some need and deficiency on the part of its own essence, it also benefits from some share of graceful blessings and bounties on His part that are bestowed upon it by Him. The very appearance of these beings in the universe is a display of their need and imperfection, which unveils the purity of their Lord from need and imperfection, and this is their glorification of Him. In like manner, the very appearance of these beings is also a display of the grace of their Lord that they have received, which unveils His beautiful attributes. This is how these beings all praise their Lord, because praise is nothing but lauding one for a voluntary virtue. Therefore, they all praise their Lord as they glorify Him. This is why He says: *and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise* (17:44).

In other words: We can understand the glorification of the existents by considering them in the sense that they reveal what their Lord has through displaying their need and imperfection—while they are cognizant of this. And we can understand their praise by considering them in the sense that they reveal what their Lord has through displaying the bounties that they have—such as existence and other aspects of perfection. Finally, if we consider the beings in the sense that they reveal their Lord's attributes of perfection or His purity from imperfections irrespective of their knowledge and cognition to what they are revealing, then they are being signs (*āyāt*) of God that point to him.

The verse says: *but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44).

This expression is the best evidence that glorification in this verse does not merely mean that the beings are signs of God's purity from having partners or aspects of imperfection, because whether this statement is addressed to the polytheists in particular or all people in general—including believer and polytheist—they all understand how the beings are indicative of their Creator. Yet the verse is negating their understanding.

It is not worth listening to the opinion of some that the address is directed at the polytheists, and what is meant by their lack of any understanding is their lack of contemplating this reality and benefitting from it, which renders their understanding equivalent to no understanding. Similarly, some have said: They do not understand some aspects of the glorification of the beings, but the verse has negated all understanding from them as a form of generalization (*taghlīb*).

According to the first interpretation, the verse is saying that "it is as if they totally lack understanding," and according to the second interpretation it is saying that "they lack total understanding." Neither of these interpretations, however, is acceptable, because: 1. They do not match the context of argumentation, for the last verse was an argument for God's purity. 2. Overall such loose and inaccurate expression (*musāmaḥah*) and generalization (*taghlīb*) are not typical of the Book of God.

It should be noted that the negation of the polytheists' understanding seen below in verse 17:45 (*And when you recite the Qur'an…*) is no support for the above interpretations, because that verse serves to negate their understanding of the Qur'an, which is not the same as negating their understanding of how existents indicate God's purity. This understanding [of the existents' indication] is necessary to complete the proof against them.[1]

Therefore, the truth is that the glorification attributed in the verse to all things is real glorification. This assertion has recurred in His Book concerning the heavens, the earth, and everything and everyone therein. Some of these are cases that can only bear the real meaning [of glorification], for example He says: *And We made the mountains, and the birds to celebrate Our praise with David* (21:79), and: *Surely We made the mountains to sing the glory (of Allah) in unison with him at the evening and the sunrise* (38:38). A similar idea is seen in the verse: *O mountains! sing praises with*

1 All human beings have the capacity to gain this understanding as explained above. (Trans.)

him, and the birds (34:10). Given these verses, it is not sensible to interpret glorification as an expression of their state, or literally "the tongue of state or mood" (*lisān al-ḥāl*).

There are multiple narrations through both Shia and Sunni chains that objects have glorifications, including narrations about the glorification of pebbles in the hand of God's Messenger. Some of these narrations will be presented below in Discussion of the Narrations, God-willing.

…surely He is Forbearing, Forgiving: That is: He gives respite and time instead of hastening to punishment, and He forgives whoever repents and returns to Him. Both of these attributes indicate His purity from every imperfection, because an implication of His forbearance is that He is not afraid of any loss of opportunity [to avenge], and an implication of His forgiveness is that He does not incur a loss due to forgiveness or effusion of mercy. These two together show that His sovereignty cannot ever be lost or reduced.

Some have said that this last part of the verse refers to mankind's shortcoming in understanding the constant glorification of all things—including every bit of their own being—in the most expressive way. So mankind deserve being penalized for this mistake and shortcoming, but God does not hasten to their punishment due to His forbearance, and forgives it if He wills by His forgiveness.

This is a fine point and it entails that it is within the human being's capacity to understand the act of glorification by himself and by other beings. Hopefully we may have the chance to explain this in an appropriate place, if God wills.

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَسْتُورًا ﴿٤٥﴾

(17:45) ***And when you recite the Qur'an, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hidden barrier.***

Apparently the reason why this barrier is described as "hidden" is that it is hidden from the senses, as opposed the veils and barriers that the people regularly use to cover something from something else. Therefore, it is about a spiritual barrier that is placed between the Prophet—as the reciter and carrier of the Qur'an—and the polytheists who do not believe in the hereafter. This barrier veils the Prophet from them and as a result

they are unable to understand the reality of the Qur'an's teachings; they are unable to believe in him; and they are unable to admit that he is a messenger that has come from God by the truth. That is why they turn away from him when he mentions God in Oneness, deny the hereafter insistently, and accuse him of being bewitched. This idea is confirmed by the verses that follow.

The verse describes the polytheists as "those who do not believe in the hereafter" because the denial of hereafter renders belief in God's unity and the messengership void. Therefore, disbelief in the hereafter entails disbelief in all fundamental religious beliefs. Moreover, this description prepares the grounds for the following verses that talk about their denial of resurrection.

The implied meaning is: When you read and recite the Qur'an to them, We set a spiritual barrier that they are unaware of between you and the polytheists, who are those that do not believe in the hereafter—as a disapproving description of them. As a result, they cannot listen to the mention of God alone, they do not acknowledge your messengership from the Truth, they cannot understand the reality of the hereafter, and they do not believe in it.

The exegetes have some other interpretations for "hidden barrier" (*mastūran*). Some have said that the *mafʿūl* form of *mastūr* means being characterized by that root. For example, *rajūl marṭūb* means one who is characterized by moisture nature (*dhū ruṭūbah*);[1] *makān mahūl* means a place that is characterized by terror (*dhū hawl*); and *jāriyah maghnūjah* means a bondmaid who is characterized by coquetry (*dhātu ghunj*). This is seen in His words: *Surely His promise shall come to pass* (maʾtiyyā) (19:61), where His promise is described as *maʾtiyyā* (in the form *mafʿūl*), meaning a promise that is characterized by *ityān* (coming, occurring). However, this meaning usually comes in the form of *fāʿil*, such as *lābin* and *tāmir*.[2]

It has been narrated from al-Akhfash that sometimes the object form

1 This is based on ancient medicine. It refers to a phlegmatic individual (*balghamī*) whose nature and temper (*ṭabīʿah, mizāj*) is dominated by wetness or moisture as opposed to dryness (*yubūsah*). Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmah*, under *marṭūb*. (Trans.)

2 *Lābin* means an animal (like a camel) that has milk (*dhū laban*) or a person that has or sells milk. *Tāmir* means a palm that has dates (*dhū tamr*) or a person who has or sells dates. (Trans.)

(*mafʿūl*) has the meaning of a subject (*fāʿil*). For example, *maymūn* means *yāmin* (auspicious) and *mashʾūm* means *shāʾim* (inauspicious). Likewise, the subject form sometimes means an object. For example, *māʾin dāfiq* [as in 86:6] means *madfūq* (water that is poured forth) and *mastūr* sometimes means *sātir* (veiling, covering).

Some have said that this is a metaphorical or allegorical expression (*majāz*), because what is really hidden (*mastūr*) is that which is behind the barrier not the barrier itself.

Others have said that the verse involves an omission from the original: A barrier by which the Messenger is hidden from them.

Some have said: it means a barrier that is hidden by another barrier, referring to several barriers [that God places between the Prophet and them]. Others have said: It means a barrier that is hidden and unknown to be a barrier, meaning that they are ignorant of their ignorance. The last three interpretations are least likely.

وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا ۚ وَإِذَا ذَكَرْتَ رَبَّكَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَحْدَهُ وَلَّوْا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهِمْ نُفُورًا ﴿٤٦﴾

(17:46) *And We have placed coverings* (akinnatan) *on their hearts and a heaviness* (waqran) *in their ears lest they understand it, and when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an they turn their backs in aversion* (nufūran).

Akinnah is the plural of *kinn*, which, according to al-Rāghib, is what is used to protect something and cover it from others. *Waqr* means heaviness in hearing. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

> *Nufūr* is the plural of *nāfir* (one who is averse). This is a general rule that applies to all derived subject forms in the form of *fuʿūl* such as *rukūʿ* [plural of *rākiʿ*: one who bows], *sujūd* [plural of *sājid*: one who prostrates] and *shuhūd* [plural of *shāhid*: witness].

This verse serves as an explanation and interpretation of the barrier mentioned in the previous verse. It means that We cover their hearts by coverings and veils so that they may not understand the Qur'an; We place weights and heaviness in their ears so that they may not give ear to the Qur'an with submission and may not understand it with conviction and acceptance. All of this is a punishment for their disbelief [that is, covering the truth] and wrongdoing.

…and when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an they turn their backs in aversion: That is: When you proclaim monotheism and deny polytheism, they turn their backs in aversion, shirk and depart.

نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَسْتَمِعُونَ بِهِ إِذْ يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِذْ هُمْ نَجْوَىٰ إِذْ يَقُولُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا ﴿٤٧﴾

(17:47) ***We know best by what they listen when they listen to you, and when they take counsel secretly*** **(najwā)*****, when the unjust say: You follow only a man bewitched.***

Najwā is an infinitive, that is why it is the same for singular, double,[1] plural, masculine and feminine.

This verse serves as a justification for what was said in the last verse—that He has placed coverings on their hearts and heaviness in their ears, where *"We know best by what they listen …"* refers to the placement of heaviness [in their ears], and *"when they take counsel secretly…"* refers to the placement of covering [on their hearts].

God is saying: We know best about the ears by which they listen to you, and the hearts by which they reflect your message. This only makes sense because He is the Creator of these faculties and the Director of their affairs. Hence, when He says that He has placed coverings on their hearts and heaviness in their ears, it is a report that is the truest and most deserving of being accepted. *"We know best by what they listen"*: That is, We are best aware of their ears when they listen to you, and We are best aware of their hearts *"when they take counsel secretly."* That is about when they whisper and exchange views with one another while they are careful not to speak aloud or raise their voice. The unjust means those who speak among them while they are unjust in their speech that *"You follow only a man bewitched."* This very statement shows that they have not realized the truth.

The verse implicitly implies—rather, it explicitly indicates—that they [the polytheists] would not come openly to listen to the Qur'an from the Prophet as they were afraid of blame [from one another]. Instead, they would sneak by in disguise, and if they came across one another in that condition they would start blaming each other in whisper so that the

1 Applicable to Arabic, not English. (Trans.)

Prophet and the believers may not find out about their presence. That is when some of them would tell others: *You follow only a man bewitched* (17:47). This interpretation confirms what has been narrated about the context of revelation of this verse, which we shall present in the following Discussion of the Narrations by the will of God.

انْظُرْ كَيْفَ ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثَالَ فَضَلُّوا فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٨﴾

(17:48) *See what they liken you to* (ḍarabū laka al-amthāl, from ḍarb al-mathal)*! So they have gone astray and cannot find the way.*

Mathāl means description (*waṣf*). *Ḍarb al-amthāl* means describing one's attributes and characteristics. The meaning of the verse is patent. The verse implies that there is no hope in their faith, as He says: *And it is alike to them whether you warn them or warn them not: they do not believe* (36:10).

وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرُفَاتًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

(17:49) *And they say: What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles* (rufātan)*, shall we then certainly be raised up, being a new creation?*

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Rufāt* is the debris and worn-out pieces of anything. The form *fuʿāl* is often used for anything that is broken and ground such as *ḥuṭām* (chaff), *duqāq* (flour) and *turāb* (dust). Al-Mubarrid says: Anything that is fully ground to the point of becoming a powder is called *rufāt*.

This verse continues the discussion of their lack of understanding of the Qur'an by talking about their doubt in the resurrection which is one of the most important assertions of the Qur'an. Indeed the resurrection is one of the clearest concepts that has been proven through both the revelation and the intellect, to the extent that God has described it in a few places in His Book as *"there is no doubt in it"* (*lā rayba fīhi*).[1] This is while they [the polytheists] had no argument for its denial, except that it seemed improbable and unlikely to them.

1 See verses 3:9, 3:25, 4:87, 6:12, 42:7, 45:26. (Trans.)

One of the most important factors that made this improbability sound just to their hearts was their impression that death means annihilation, and it is very unlikely that something may be generated out of sheer nihility. This is seen in what they said: *"when we shall have become bones and decayed particles"*—meaning when nothing remains of our bodies after death other than bones, and even the bones decay, crumble and turn into particles—"will we then be turned into a new creation and return as human beings as we were before? *That is afar (from probable) return* [50:3]." That is why He answers them back by reminding them of His absolute power and their first creation, as we shall see below.

قُلْ كُونُوا حِجَارَةً أَوْ حَدِيدًا ﴿٥٠﴾

(17:50) ***Say: Become stones or iron.***

Or some other creature of those which are too hard (to receive life) in your minds! But they will say: Who will return us? Say: Who created you at first. Still they will shake their heads at you and say: When will it be? Say: Maybe it has drawn nigh. (17:51)

This is an answer to their doubt. Since they had talked about "becoming" bones (in *What! when we shall have become*; 17:49) God orders His Prophet to challenge them by commanding them to *"become stones or irons…"* This is because the transformation of these things to a human being would be more difficult and less probable to them than the transformation of powdered bones.

These verses imply that God's absolute power does not fall short of renewing the creation of anything that He wants, and it does not make any difference to Him whether that thing is bones, powder, stones, iron, or something else.

The implied meaning is: Tell them to be something harder than bones and powder such as stones, iron or some other creature that seems greater to their minds and less likely to have a human being created of it. Tell them to be whatever they wish, for indeed God will give them their initial creation again and resurrect them.

أَوْ خَلْقًا مِمَّا يَكْبُرُ فِي صُدُورِكُمْ ۚ فَسَيَقُولُونَ مَنْ يُعِيدُنَا ۖ قُلِ الَّذِي
فَطَرَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۚ فَسَيُنْغِضُونَ إِلَيْكَ رُءُوسَهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هُوَ ۖ قُلْ

عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونَ قَرِيبًا ﴿٥١﴾

(17:51) ***Or some other creature of those which are too hard (to receive life) in your minds! But they will say: Who will return us? Say: Who created you at first. Still they will shake their heads at you and say: When will it be? Say: Maybe it has drawn nigh.***

That is: When you answer their doubt by telling them that they shall be resurrected regardless of what they become and how they transform, then they will say: "Who will return us to the human creation that we had?" So you tell them that God will do so, but refer to Him by a description that would leave no room for their doubt anymore: That He created them the first round while they were nothing. Say: "He *Who created you at first* will return you."

Therefore, replacing the majestic name *[Allāh]* by "*Who created you at first*" is to prove the possibility of return and refute its unlikelihood by presenting a similar case [that is, a precedent].

…Still they will shake **(fa-sa-yunghiḍūna, from inghāḍ)** ***their heads at you and say: When will it be? Say: Maybe it has drawn nigh:*** Al-Rāghib says, "*Inghāḍ* is when one shakes his head in the direction of someone else as one who is surprised by him."

The implied meaning is: When you knock them by the above argument—drawing on God's power over everything and their first creation—you will see them shaking their heads in front of you in derision, derogation and contempt, saying: When will it be? In response, you tell them: *Maybe it has drawn nigh* (17:51), meaning that there is no way to know about this for it is one of the hidden (*ghayb*) things that no one knows about except God. Nevertheless, God informs them about the attributes of that day where He gives them a description of the day instead of determining its time: *On the day when He will call you forth, then shall you respond to Him, giving Him praise…* (17:52).

يَوْمَ يَدْعُوكُمْ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمْدِهِ وَتَظُنُّونَ إِن لَّبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٥٢﴾

(17:52) ***On the day when*** **(yawma)** ***He will call you forth, then shall you respond to Him, giving Him praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little (while).***

Yawma is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection, which means that there is an implicit verb here: "On the day when 'you are resurrected' (*tubʿathūna*) He will call…" His call means His command to rise for the Day of Judgment, and their response means their acceptance of the divine call. "Giving Him praise" qualifies their state while they respond. The implied meaning is: You will respond while you are covered in His praise; that is, you will be in a state of praising Him. This means that you will count His resurrection and return of you as a good act for which its doer should be praised and admired. This is because on that day it will become clear to you that divine wisdom necessitates that the people should be resurrected for reckoning, and that there must be a second realm after the first.

…and you will think that you tarried but a little (while): That is: You will have the impression that you stayed in your graves after death but a short period. At that point you will realize how truly close this day [of resurrection] had been to you.

God has confirmed this impression of theirs but He has rejected the specific time periods that they will speculate. He says: *He will say: You did tarry but a little—had you but known (it)* (23:114); *And at the time when the hour shall come, the guilty shall swear (that) they did not tarry but an hour; thus are they ever turned away. And those who are given knowledge and faith will say: Certainly you tarried according to the ordinance of Allah till the day of resurrection, so this is the day of resurrection* (30:55-56). There are other verses in this regard.

Saying that *"you will think that you tarried but a little (while)"* indirectly counters their mocking views about the Day of Resurrection and how far away it is. It also supports the possible proximity of it that was mentioned above: *Say: Maybe it has drawn nigh* (17:51). The verse is saying that soon you will deem it to be very close. Likewise, *"shall you obey Him, giving Him praise"* subtly counters their derision of this idea [of resurrection] and their amazement by it. That is: On the Day of Resurrection you will praise him even though today you see it unlikely and mock this matter.

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزَغُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُبِينًا ﴿٥٣﴾

(17:53) ***And say to My servants (that) they speak*** **(yaqūlū)** ***that which is best; surely Satan sows dissensions among them; surely***

the Satan is an open enemy to man.

The context suggests that *"My servants"* are the believers. Hence, their ascription to God is an honorary one. *"They speak"* is what the servants are being commanded to. That is why *yaqūlū* is *majzūm* in terms of inflection, because it is the object of an imperative. "That which is best" means a speech that is the best, meaning that it should be spoken with good manners and without harshness, swearing, or any other evil.

This verse and the next two follow the same context. Overall, they command to saying good words and adhering to propriety of manners in speech so that they may be secure from Satan's sowing of dissension among them. Furthermore, they should know that the matter is up to God's will, not up to the Prophet. The Prophet cannot waive the duties for those who subscribe to him and those whom he sees worthy of felicity. He cannot say anything that he wants, deprive others of every good, or say evil things about anyone, because one has nothing but the goodness of heart and excellence of manners. Indeed God has made some prophets to excel others in these qualities, and he privileged David by giving him the Psalms, which consists of good speech and the glorification of God.

This shows that before the migration, the believers used to converse with the polytheists, and at times they used to speak roughly with them and say harsh words. Perhaps they would confront them by telling them that they will go to Hell while the group of believers will go to Paradise thanks to the Prophet. These speeches would arouse the polytheists against them and only add to their enmity, leading them to increase their punishment and torture the believers, harm the Prophet more, and insist further in defying the truth.

Thus God ordered His Prophet to command them [the believers] to speak the best speech. This conforms to the context of the previous verses, because it was just mentioned above how the polytheists insulted the Prophet by calling him *"a man bewitched"* (17:47), and how they ridiculed the Qur'an with all of its teachings about the origin and the end [of creation]. This should explain how these three verses [that is, this one and the next two] relate to one another, and how they relate as a set to the previous verses. Contemplate this!

And say to My servants (that) they speak that which is best…: This is a command to a command. The object of command is speaking that which is best. It is similar to His words: *And have disputations with them*

in the best manner (16:125).

…surely Satan sows dissensions among them: This is a justification for the above command.

…surely Satan is an open enemy to man: This justifies Satan's sowing of dissension among them. Some have suggested that the command to *"speak that which is best"* forbids them from fighting with the polytheists and commands them to treat them peacefully instead. It is addressed to the believers who were in Mecca before the migration, as inferred from the narrations that define the circumstances of revelation of these verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Hence, the verse is similar to His words: *And you shall speak to men good words* (2:83). However, it should be clear to you that the justifications in the verse [that is, *"surely Satan sows…"* and *"surely Satan is an open enemy…"*] do not support this interpretation.

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ ۖ إِنْ يَشَأْ يَرْحَمْكُمْ أَوْ إِنْ يَشَأْ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ ۚ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

(17:54) ***Your Lord knows you best; He will have mercy on you if He wills , or He will chastise you if He wills ; and We have not sent you as being in charge of them.***

As mentioned above, this verse and the next one complete the previous verse. Therefore, the first part of the verse is a continuation of what the Prophet has been ordered to tell the believers which began by *"And say to My servants (that) they speak…"* (17:53). The subsequent part of the verse [that is, *"and We have not sent you…"*] is specifically addressed to the Prophet. Hence, there is no switch in the address of the verses.[1]

It could also be that the first part of the verse is addressed to the Prophet and the believers together [just as the last verse] except that here they are being addressed directly in second person as opposed to third person. This complies more with the context of the previous verse and makes the verses more uniform and consistent, all being an address by God.

Either way, the first part of this verse (*Your Lord knows you best; He will have mercy on you if He wills, or He will chastise you if He wills*) provides a second justification for the command in the previous verse. It is

1 This is because the last verse also started with an address to the Prophet. (Trans.)

saying that the believers must abstain from harsh words against others and from judging the felicity or wretchedness of the individuals, which is something that God knows best. For example, they should not say that "So-and-so is felicitous because he is a follower of the Prophet while so-and-so is doomed," or that "So-and-so will go to Paradise and so-and-so is destined for Hell." Instead, they should leave this matter to their Lord and defer it to Him. It is saying: *"Your Lord"*—talking to the Prophet and others—*"knows you best"* and He will judge between you according to His knowledge to whom deserves mercy and whom deserves chastisement. *"He will have mercy on you if He wills"*: and He does not will this unless you believe and do righteous deeds, as He has clarified in His Book. *"Or He will chastise you if He wills"*: and He does not will this except in cases of disbelief and sin. "And We have not sent you"—O our Prophet—*"as being in charge of them"*: such that their affairs would be up to you, that you may decide whatever you want for whomever you wish, like giving to one and withholding from another.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that the uncertainty seen in *"He will have mercy on you if He wills , or He will chastise you if He wills"* is because God's will differs according to one's belief or disbelief, and one's good deeds or evil deeds. It should also be clear that "We have not sent you as being in charge of them" is to forbid the believers from relying on the Prophet and their label as the followers of his religion as the means of their salvation. It is similar to His words: *(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires nor in accordance with the vain desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it* (4:123), and: *Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord* (2:62), as well as other verses to this effect.

There are some other discussions with regard to this verse that we left out as there was no benefit in them.

وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَلَقَدْ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَ النَّبِيِّينَ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۖ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ زَبُورًا ﴿٥٥﴾

(17:55) ***And your Lord best knows those who are in the heavens and the earth; and certainly We have made some of the prophets***

to excel others, and to We gave to David Psalms

The first part of this verse elaborates the justification in the previous verse. It is as if it is said: How would your Lord not know you best while He best knows those who are in the heavens and the earth, and you are among them?

…and certainly We have made some of the prophets to excel others: This serves as a preparation for what follows: *and We gave to David Psalms*. This sentence shows David's excellence based on his Book—the Psalms—as it comprises of the most excellent words in the glorification and praise of God, and as it encourages the believers to incline toward good words, and to adhere to proper codes and manners in their conversations and speeches.

The exegetes have discussed other points in the interpretation of this verse that we leave out; interested readers should refer to the extensive books of *tafsīr*.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 17:42 (*If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of the Throne*) one of the Infallibles said: If the idols were gods as you suppose, then they would have climbed up to the Throne.[1]

Author's comment: What is meant by "climbing up to the Throne" is that they would have taken the affairs of the universe in their hands. Some have interpreted the Throne (*ʿarsh*) as the sphere (*falak*) that determines the dimensions [of the physical world] or a great luminous body that is above the physical realm, but there is no Qur'anic evidence for these meanings. Even if these definitions are correct, there is no implication between lordship and climbing over such a body.

(2) The Prophet said: When Noah was about to die he told his two sons, "I enjoin you to [utter] 'Glory and praise be to God' (*subḥān Allāhi wa bi-ḥamdihi*), for indeed it is the prayer of everything and everything receives sustenance by it."[2]

Author's comment: What we discussed above about the meaning

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿImrān.

of the glorification (*tasbīḥ*) of the beings would clarify the link between the glorification of every being and its sustenance (*rizq*). This is because sustenance is determined according to need and request, and each being glorifies God by displaying its need and inadequacy, which show His purity from that.

(3) Abū al-Ṣabāḥ said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about His words: *And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise* (17:44). He said: "Everything glorifies Him with His praise. When we see a wall cracking, that is its glorification."[1]

Author's comment: He [al-ʿAyyāshī] has also narrated this on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd, from the Imam.

(4) Imam Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad narrated from his father: The Messenger of God prohibited branding the livestock or hitting them on the face, because they glorify their Lord with praise.[2]

Author's comment: The prohibition of hitting them on the face has also been reported by al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfī*, with his chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from the Prophet, where the Imam then adds: "In another hadith he [the Prophet] said: Do not brand them on the face."

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: There is no bird or wild animal that is hunted in land or in sea except due to its neglect on glorification [of God].[3]

Author's comment: This idea has been narrated through several chains on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd, Abū al-Dardāʾ, Abu Hurayrah and others, from the Prophet.

(6) Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad said Once a man came to my father and said, "May my parents be your ransom! I read that God says in His Book: *There is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise* [17:44]." He said, "This is indeed the case, as God has said." He asked, "What about a dried tree, does it also glorify [God]?" He answered, "Yes! Have you not heard the sound of the wood that is used in a house? That is its glorification. So glory be to God

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Nawfalī, on the authority of al-Sakūnī.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār.

at all times."[1]

(7) The Messenger of God said: Surely the ants glorify [God].[2]

(8) The Messenger of God prohibited to kill frogs and said, "Its sound is [its] glorification."[3]

(9) Abū Ḥamzah said: Once we were with ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn when a flock of sparrows passed by us chirping. He said, "Do you know what these sparrows are saying?" "No," we replied. He said, "I do not claim to have knowledge of the unseen, but I heard my father say: I heard ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib say, 'When the birds start their day they glorify their Lord and ask Him their food for that day.' This is their glorification whereby they ask for their sustenance of the day."[4]

Author's comment: A similar account has been narrated [in *al-Durr al-manthūr*] on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh and Abū Nuʿaym's *Ḥilyat* [*al-awliyāʾ*], on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah, from Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. That narration goes as follows: Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn heard some sparrows chirping and said, "Do you know what they are saying?" I [Abū Ḥamzah] said, "No." He said, "They glorify their Lord and ask Him for their food of the day."

(10) ʿĀʾishah said: One day the Messenger of God came to me and said, "O ʿĀʾishah, wash these two clothes." I said, "O Messenger of God, I just washed them yesterday." He said, "Do you not know that clothes glorify [God] but when they are stained they cease to do so?"[5]

(11) The Messenger of God said: The lifespan of all livestock, insects, ants, fleas, locusts, horses, mules, and all crawling creatures and other than them, is in glorification. Once their glorification stops God captures their souls. It is not up to the Angel of Death [to

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ṣadaqah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Nasāʾī, Abū al-Shaykh and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Khaṭīb.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Khaṭīb's Tarīkh.

choose when they shall die].[1]

Author's comment: Perhaps what he means by "It is not up to the Angel of Death" is that the Angel of Death does not directly take charge of capturing their souls, but does so through the means of other angels and assistants. At any rate, the angels are intermediate means and instruments [in God's actions].

(12) The Messenger of God passed by a group of people who were mounted on their animals [camels, horses, mules or donkeys] but were not moving. He told them: Mount them peacefully and dismount them peacefully. Do not take them as seats for your conversations in the paths and markets, for indeed it could be that an animal is better than its rider and more remembering of God than him.[2]

(13) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: An animal has six rights over its owner: i) He should not load it beyond its ability. ii) He should not take its back as a seat for conversations. iii) He should feed it first when he makes a stop. iv) He should not brand it on its face. v) He should not hit it [on the face] because it glorifies [God]. 6. He should let it drink water whenever he passes by water.[3]

(14) ʿAlqamah and Ibn Masʿūd have narrated: "Once when we were sitting and eating with the Prophet, we heard the food glorify [God] as the Messenger of God ate. Once Mukraz al-ʿĀmirī came to him and asked him for a sign [that is, a miracle]. He [the Prophet] took seven pebbles and they started glorifying in his hand."

Abū Dharr's narration says: "He [the Prophet] put the pebbles down on the ground and they stopped glorifying and became silent. Then he took them again in his hand and they started glorifying once again."

Ibn ʿAbbās said: "The rulers of Ḥaḍramawt came to the Prophet and asked him, 'How can we know that you are God's messenger?' The Prophet took a handful of pebbles and said, 'These pebbles testify that I am God's messenger.' Thus the pebbles started

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAqīlī's al-Ḍuʿafāʾ, Abū al-Shaykh and al-Daylamī, on the authority of Anas.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, on the authority of Muʿādh, on the authority of Anas.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Sakūnī.

glorifying [God] in his hands and they testified that he is God's messenger."[1]

(15) The Prophet used to deliver sermons in Medina next to a column [of palm tree]. But then they built a pulpit for him as the number of attendants increased. When the Prophet sat on the pulpit to deliver sermon, the column groaned like a camel. So the Prophet went to it and patted it in honor, whereby it sobbed like an infant that is pacified.[2]

Author's comment: There are truly numerous narrations in a wide variety about the glorification of beings. Some may have been mistaken in thinking that this universal glorification of all things is a matter of sound and noise, and that all beings have one or many languages that consist of terms that have been set for meanings, just as human beings have words that unveil what they hold inside, except that our senses are blocked from their speech. However, you can see that this is a misconception.

What we concluded from the above discussion under this noble verse [17:44] is that every being has a glorification which is a speech in the real sense of it: A conscious expression of the purity of its Lord by means of displaying its own imperfection in its essence, attributes and actions. This is [real] speech. Therefore, what has been narrated about hearing the glorification of pebbles in the hand of the Prophet, hearing the glorification of mountains and birds when David used to glorify, and other similar accounts, are all about understanding their real glorification in the true sense of the term through an inward realization. Once this is achieved, one's inner senses report this reality accordingly in the form of conventional words and terms that convey the meaning that these people have understood.

This is similar to the appearance of transcendent meanings that are free from form (*ṣūrah*) in the form of familiar forms in dreams. For example, the reality of Jacob and his household appeared to Joseph in his dream in the form of the sun, the moon and the stars. Likewise are the other dreams that God has recounted in the story of Joseph, as discussed above [in Chapter 12].

Therefore, when the glorification, praise, testimony or other similar

1 Ibn Shahr-Āshūb in *al-Manāqib*.

2 *Al-Manāqib*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh al-Anṣārī, Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿUbayy b. Kaʿb and Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn.

acts of the creatures are unveiled for someone, what he realizes first and foremost is its real meaning [inwardly], and then his inner sense (*al-ḥiss al-bāṭin*) narrates that meaning in the form of audible words that convey the realized meaning. God knows best.

(16) When Chapter 111 (*Perdition overtake both hands of Abu Lahab…*) was revealed, al-ʿAwrāʾ Umm Jamīl came by roaring while she had some pebbles in her hand: "He has rebuked our father! We hate his religion! We disobey his command!" The Messenger of God was sitting there next to Abū Bakr. Abū Bakr told him, "This woman is now coming and I am afraid that she sees you." The Prophet replied, "There is no way that she shall see me," and he recited a recitation to protect himself by it, as He says: And when you recite the Qur'an, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hidden barrier (17:45). So she came until she reached Abū Bakr and stood next to him, but she could not see the Prophet. Then she said, "O Abū Bakr! I have heard that your fellow has reviled me." Abū Bakr said, "No, by the Lord of this House he has not reviled you." So she went away while she was saying, "Quraysh knows that I am the daughter of their chief."[1]

Author's comment: A shorter version of this account has been narrated through another chain of narration, on the authority of Asmāʾ, Abū Bakr and Ibn ʿAbbās. It has also been reported in *Biḥār*, on the authority of Qurb al-Isnād, on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Ẓarīf, on the authority of Maʿmar, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his father, from his grandfather, in a narration where he discusses a series of the Prophet's miracles.

(17) Concerning *"In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful"* one of the two Imams [that is, Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq] said: It is what deserves most to be uttered aloud, and it is the verse about which God has said: *And when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an*—meaning "In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful"—*they turn their backs in aversion* (17:46). The polytheists used to listen to the Prophet's recitation, but when he would recite *"In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful"* they would turn their backs and go away. Then, when he was finish with that

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Yaʿlī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī—both in *al-Dalāʾil*—on the authority of Asmāʾ b. Abū Bakr.

they would come back and listen again.[1]

Author's comment: The same idea has been narrated on the authority of Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. Al-Qummī has also narrated this in his *Tafsīr* without naming the Imam.

(18) Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī said: Why have you concealed *"In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful"*? By God they have concealed the best of names, for indeed whenever the Messenger of God entered his home, the Quraysh would gather around him. He would then utter aloud and raise his voice saying: *"In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful,"* whereby the Quraysh would turn away and escape. Thus God revealed: *And when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an they turn their backs in aversion* (17:46).[2]

(19) Al-Zuhrī said: I have been narrated that one night Abū Jahl, Abū Sufyān and Akhnas b. Sharīq went out to listen to the Messenger of God while he was performing prayer in his house. Each of them found a spot to sit and eavesdrop, unaware of the presence of the other two. So they spent the entire night listening to him. At dawn they all got up and left, only to meet one another in their way back. They started blaming each other and saying, "Do not do this again! If one of your ignorant followers sees you [doing this] then you would create serious doubts in his mind."

They departed that day, but they all came back the next night and each sat at his spot. They spent the night again listening to the Prophet until dawn. In their way back they met again and they had the same conversation as the last night. Then they departed, but only to go there again and sit in their spots to listen to him the entire night. They met again at dawn on the way back. They told one another, "This time there is no way but to make a pledge not to do this again." So they pledged with one another and departed. In the morning al-Akhnas went to see Abū Sufyān at his home and asked him, "Tell me what you think about what you have heard from Muḥammad." He said, "By God I have heard things that I understand their meaning and what they refer to, and I have also heard things that I do not understand their meaning or

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī's Tarīkh.

what they refer to." Al-Akhnas confirmed, "Me too, by the One to Whom I have pledged. "

He then left Abū Sufyān and went to see Abū Jahl and asked him, "What do you think about what you have heard from Muḥammad?" He answered, "What have I heard!? We have competed with the children of ʿAbd Manāf in leadership: They have fed the people and we have fed the people; they have born burdens and we have born burdens; they have given charity and we have given charity. When they saw that we have kept up with them like two competing horses, they are now claiming that they have a prophet who receives revelation from the heaven. How can they be matched in this? Nay, by God we would never believe in him or confirm what he says." Then al-Akhnas got up and left.[1]

(20) Al-Kalbī said: The polytheists used to harass the Companions of God's Messenger in Mecca. Therefore they used to complain to him, "O Messenger of God! Grant us permission to fight them back," but he would tell them, "I have not been commanded to anything in this regard about them." Then God revealed: *And say to My servants…* (17:53).[2]

Author's comment: We said in the exposition of this verse that this account does not comply with the context of the verse. God knows best.

almizan.org

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Verses 56-65

These verses follow another course of arguments to prove God's unity and refute the authority of the other gods that the polytheists used to subscribe to. The verses say that these gods cannot remove or transfer distress from their worshippers, but they are just like their worshippers in terms of being in need of God. These gods themselves seek the means of access to God, hope for His mercy and fear His chastisement.

The verses say that distress, extermination and punishment are in God's hand. He has decreed in the book [of divine ordinance] that He will destroy every town before the Day of Resurrection or punish it with a severe chastisement. Indeed the ancient generations received divine signs and communications but they denied and rejected them, which resulted in an exterminating punishment being sent to them. That is why God does not send such signs to the later generations anymore, for He has willed not to hasten to their destruction. However, corruption will still spread among them and Satan will misguide them. Thus, the word [that is, God's decree to punish the transgressors] proves true against them and therefore God will destroy them. Indeed God's command will be executed.

Commentary

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَلا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ الضُّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَ لا تَحْوِيلاً ﴿٥٦﴾

(17:56) ***Say: Call*** **(udʿū, from duʿāʾ)** ***on those whom you assert*** **(zaʿamtum, from zaʿm)** ***besides Him, so they shall not control the removal of distress from you nor (its) transference.***

Zaʿm—which is also pronounced as *zuʿm* and *ziʿm*—means any belief, but it is usually used for wrong beliefs. That is why it has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that "Whatever the Qur'an calls *zaʿm* is a lie."

Duʿāʾ and *nidāʾ* are the same, except that *nidāʾ* only refers to calling by voice, while *duʿāʾ* is sometimes used for other ways of communication such as hint or gesture. Concerning the difference between the two some

exegetes have said:

> *Nidāʾ* is when one says *yā* or *ayā* (lit. "O") without uttering the name of the person, but *duʿāʾ* is only when the person's name is also mentioned, such as *yā fulān* ("O so-and-so").

The verse argues to refute what they worship other than God by saying that the god which deserves to be worshipped must be able to bring about benefit and protect against loss. This is a necessary requirement of lordship. The polytheists acknowledge this, and it is exactly for this reason that they have taken up these gods and worship them: because they hope for their benefit and fear their harm. However, what they call besides God are incapable of benefiting or harming anyone, and that is why they are not gods.[1] The evidence for this is that their worshippers call them to remove distress from them or transfer it to others, yet they can neither remove nor transfer it.

How could they ever remove or transfer any distress on their own, and how can they meet any need or fulfill any want independently when they are themselves God's creatures that seek means of access to Him, hope for His mercy and fear His chastisement—as the polytheists admit?

Hence it is clarified that "those whom you assert besides Him" are what they used to worship including the angels, the jinn and mankind. Their worship of the idols was also intended as a means of seeking proximity to those [living] beings [that the idols represent]. Likewise, they used to worship the sun, the moon and the starts as a means of seeking nearness to their spiritual realities—that is, angels.

Idols have no reality in and of themselves, as He has said: *They are naught but names which you have named, you and your fathers* (53:23). What has been built out of wood or metal is nothing but an inanimate object. In this sense they are not idols to be prostrated, glorified, or used as means of seeking proximity [to God].

Furthermore, what the verse means by denying their control is to deny their control and power independent of being supported by God's help and permission. The next verse serves as evidence to this: *Those whom they call upon, themselves seek the means of access to their Lord…* (17:57).

One of the exegetes has said:

> Apparently what the verse means by denying their control is to deny their full and complete power in the removal of distress.

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1 By *modus tollens*. (Trans.)

> The unbelievers did not doubt that the power of their false gods comes from God, for they did not deny that their gods along with all of their attributes are God's creatures, and that God's attributes are stronger and more perfect than theirs.
>
> This is what would complete the argument and prove the opponent wrong. Otherwise, there is no clear evidence that the jinn and angels that they used to worship besides God have absolutely no control in the removal of distress. And one cannot argue that the unbelievers supplicate to these gods earnestly but their requests are not fulfilled, because one could counter by saying that we equally see Muslims asking God earnestly for their requests yet their pleas are sometimes not granted.
>
> Some have said that these verses deny control and power from their gods altogether, according to the Ashʿarite argument that the actions and attributes of all contingent beings directly emanate from God.

It should be noted that God has ascribed various forms of control and power to the angels, the jinn and mankind in so many verses that cannot be interpreted otherwise. However, He has ascribed the reality of control and power exclusively to Himself, as He says: *The power is wholly God's* (2:165). This shows that beings other-than-God have power over what they have power by God's conferment of power, and they own what they own by God's bestowal of ownership to them. No one is independent in power or ownership except Him. What other-than-God has in terms of power and ownership is a loan from God, and it has no impact except by His permission and will.

Based on this, there is no basis for interpreting the argument in this verse as a total denial of ownership and power from their gods—including the angels, the jinn and mankind—because the argument in the verse is saying that their objects of worships are not independent in ownership and power, and that in this sense they are just like their worshippers, for they are all in need of God and they seek means of access to Him. The true addressee of supplication and request is a power that is independent in its impact and influence. If one calls someone or something that owes its power and dominion to someone else who is the real owner of power and dominion, then the person's call and request is in reality directed at the true and independent owner of power and dominion, not at one who has been endowed with them [by someone else's endowment].

We also saw above that the exegete says that there is no clear evidence that these gods have absolutely no control in the removal of distress. In addition, one cannot draw on the idea that the unbelievers supplicate to these gods earnestly but their requests are not fulfilled, because one could counter that argument by saying that we equally see Muslims asking God earnestly for their requests but their pleas are not granted.

In fact, God has answered this objection in His Book. He says, and His speech is the truth: *I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me* (2:186), and: *Call upon Me, I will answer you* (40:60). The unconditional form of these verses show that if a servant sincerely calls upon God; if he does not take his supplication lightly; and if his heart is not attached or inclined to other-than-Him, that is, he is completely cut off from others and has recourse to Him, then His call will certainly be answered. He has discussed sincerity in call and request in a verse further below which serves as a complement for the argument presented here. He says: *And when distress afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call on except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn aside…* (17:67). This shows that when distress afflicts you in the sea, you are cut off from everything and thus turn to Him alone, guided by your primary nature (*fiṭrah*) to call Him, and He answers this call of yours and brings you safe to the land.

What is understood from the above discussion is that God indeed answers His servant when he calls on Him with a sound and empty heart that has been cut off from all other than Him. This is while the others cannot answer their callers if the caller is cut off from God and calls that god alone.[1]

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1 Here are a few points to complement the author's discussion: 1. One should also remember that this world is a place of test and trial. Therefore, God fulfills His promises in such a way that it would not eradicate the test of faith and belief. This is a fundamental principle that qualifies any promise or statement that is seen in Qur'an and hadith about this world. See verses 5:48, 6:165, 43:33-35. 2 "Call" or "supplication" (*duʿāʾ*) is not the same as "request" (*suʾāl, masʾalah*); and "answering" (*ijābah*) is not the same as the "granting or fulfillment of a request" (*iʿṭāʾ*). In verses 2:186 and 40:60 God has not promised to "grant" everything that one "asks for," but He has promised to "answer" anyone who "calls" Him. Given that *it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know* (2:216), granting every request even when they are against the person's good or against God's wisdom would not be a true and faithful answering of a call. See verses 42:26-27. 3. As the author has said, verses

This leaves no room for the above proposed objection by the polytheists, because their supplications are not answered when they call their gods, whereas they themselves see and acknowledge that whenever a distress afflicts them in the sea and they resort to God and ask Him alone, He rescues them to the land. And if the Muslims call Him on the land with the same sincerity and seriousness that others call Him in the sea, then their calls would not be rejected either and they would not be let down.

God has not contrasted their call of their gods with the Muslims' call of their God so that one may object that both calls are the same in terms of not being answered. Instead, He has contrasted the polytheists' call of their gods with their call of God in the sea when all of the means are cut off and all of whom they call go away except for God.

A subtle point in the expression of this verse is that it conveys His argument through the means of His Prophet by saying: *Say: Call on those whom you assert besides Him* (17:56). This way, if the polytheists were to challenge him by the above objection [that is, that those who call on God are also rejected at times,] then he could call his Lord with sincerity and detachment from others and this supplication of his would have been surely granted.

أُولٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلٰى رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ وَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَ يَخافُونَ عَذابَهُ إِنَّ عَذابَ رَبِّكَ كانَ مَحْذُوراً ﴿٥٧﴾

(17:57) *Those whom they call upon, themselves seek the means of access* (al-wasīlata) *to their Lord* – whoever of them is nearest – a*nd they hope for His mercy and fear His chastisement; surely the chastisement of your Lord is a thing to be cautious of.*

"Those" is a subject, "whom" is its adjective, and "they call upon" is its connective clause (*ṣilah*). The pronoun "they" (in "they call upon") refers to the polytheists. "Themselves seek" is the predicate of "those." The pronoun "themselves" and the rest of the plural pronouns in the rest of the verse refer to "those" at the beginning of the verse. "Whoever of them

2:186 and 40:60 are absolute and unconditional. Hence, we must be confident that God certainly "answers" all "calls," but the way that He answers may not necessarily be the way that we expect, especially given that this life is only a short part of all realms of existence. (Trans.)

is nearest" is an explanation for their seeking of means of access. It says that their seeking of means of access is due to search and request. This is what can be inferred from the context of the verse.

The exegetes have interpreted *wasīlah* as seeking to approach and reach someone. Sometimes *wasīlah* is used for the means by which one seeks to approach and reach someone. This second meaning is arguably more plausible given the context of the verse and the following part: *whoever of them is nearest*.

The implied meaning is, and God knows best: Those whom the polytheists call upon—including the angels, the jinn and the mankind—themselves seek the means of proximity with God. They look to see which one among them is nearest to Him so that they may also pursue his path and perform his acts in order to come close to Him like him. They hope for His mercy for every aspect of their being in which they get help from Him, and they fear His chastisement. That is why they obey Him and do not disobey. Surely the chastisement of your Lord is a thing to be cautious of, meaning that it should be avoided.

The idea of seeking proximity to Him through those who are nearest to Him is similar to His words: *O you who believe! be careful of (your duty to) Allah and seek means of nearness to Him* (5:35). However, this is different from what the polytheists and idolaters used to do. They started seeking nearness with God and advancing toward Him through the noble angels, the jinn and saints among mankind. But then they stopped worshipping God, hoping in Him and fearing Him, and instead they turned to worshipping those means, hoping for their mercy and fearing their wrath. Then they used idols and effigies as means of access to those gods. Therefore, they even forsook those gods and instead turned to worshipping the idols and seeking nearness to them by offerings and sacrifices.

At any rate, the polytheists claim to be seeking proximity to God by means of some of His servants or idols that are His creatures, but they only worship the means alone, only hope in them and only fear them, independent of God. Therefore, they set them as God's partners by holding them to be independent of Him in lordship and worship.

If "those whom they call upon" refers to the noble angels, special righteous jinn, and the prophets and saints among mankind, then the meaning of *"themselves seek the means of access to their Lord… they hope for His mercy and fear His chastisement"* would be clear. But if *"those whom they call upon"* also includes others such as rebellious devils and sinful human

beings like Pharaoh, Nimrod and others, then their seeking of access to God would refer to their subservience, prostration and glorification in the existential sense. Likewise their hope and fear would be their essential and existential hope and fear.

Some exegetes have said that all of the plural pronouns in the verse refer to "those" [at the beginning of the verse]. Then the meaning would be: Those prophets whom they [the polytheists] call besides God themselves call people toward God, or themselves call upon God in petition, and they seek the means of access to their Lord. But as you can see this is not a plausible meaning.[1]

Al-Kashshāf has interpreted the verse as follows:

> Their gods themselves seek the means of access—that is, nearness—to God. "whoever of them" means "including whoever of them…" That is: The nearest one among them also seeks means of access to God, let alone the rest that are farther away.
>
> Or perhaps "seek the means of access to their Lord" means to "hanker after and seek earnestly" (*yaḥriṣūna*). As if the verse is saying: They greedily seek to be the nearest to God, and they do so by obedience and increasing their good deeds and righteousness. Even they hope in God and fear Him like the other servants of God, so how do they [the polytheists] take them to be gods?

There is nothing wrong with either of these two meanings, except that the context does not perfectly match them. The second interpretation complies better with the context than the first.

Others have said: The verse means that those whom they call upon, worship and believe to be gods, themselves seek the means of access and nearness to God by worshipping Him, and each of them strives hard to be the nearest to His mercy.

This meaning is certainly not supported by the text of the verse.

وَ إِنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلاَّ نَحْنُ مُهْلِكُوها قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيامَةِ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُوها عَذاباً شَدِيداً كانَ ذلِكَ فِي الْكِتابِ مَسْطُوراً ﴿٥٨﴾

(17:58) ***And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the day of resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement; this***

1 This is because it does not comply with the context of the verse, especially given the previous verse. (Trans.)

is written in the Divine ordinance.

It has been said that "severe chastisement" means an exterminating punishment [in this world]. Hence, "destroy" which is used in contrast to it would mean the natural death of individuals. The implied meaning is: There is no town except that We will either make it perish before the Day of Resurrection, or that We exterminate it through punishment before the Day of Resurrection, because no town shall remain once the scroll of this world is rolled up by the advent of the Hour. He says: *And most surely We will make what is on it bare ground without herbage* (18:8). That is why some exegetes have said that "destroy" applies to righteous towns while "chastisement" applies to unrighteous ones.

Concerning the link between this verse and the last, some exegetes have said that this verse is an admonition. Others have said: After the above discussions about the resurrection and God's unity, this verse talks about some of the events that shall happen before the Day of Resurrection which shows God's magnificence and confirms the previous discussions.

However, apparently this verse refers back to what was mentioned many verses back: *And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the affluent ones, so they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction* (17:16). This is because the verses in this chapter consistently refer back to one another. The general message [of these verses] is to describe God's unchanging custom of calling the people to the truth, which is followed by giving felicity to those who listen and obey, and chastising those who arrogantly disobey and transgress.

Therefore, what is meant by "destroy" is the destruction of a town by an exterminating punishment, as it has been narrated from the exegete Abū Muslim. And what is meant by "severe chastisement" is other forms of punishment such as a famine, dearth or other natural disaster that causes the people of a town to migrate elsewhere or destroys the town's infrastructure.

Hence, the verse is implying that such towns shall be destroyed due to the corruption of their people and the transgression of the affluent ones therein (*mutrafūn*), and this is according to a decree from God, as the subsequent part of the verse indicates. This clarifies the link between this verse and the next: *And nothing could have hindered Us…* (17:59). What is meant is: These people [the current polytheists] are inclined and

disposed to transgression and denial of divine communications, which would result in the destruction and death of the deniers and refuters, for indeed We sent such communications to the ancient nations, but they rejected them and thus they were exterminated. Thus, if We were to send any of those tremendous signs to these people, then death and destruction will also befall them and that would roll up the scroll of this world. That is why We give them respite for a while, but eventually destruction will also befall these people and it will not miss them—as He has alluded to this custom in the verses: *And every nation had a messenger…* (10:47).

Some exegetes have maintained that "town" in this verse means towns of the unfaithful and that the context of the verse does not support the inclusion of all towns. However, there is no proof for this claim.

***…this is written in the Divine ordinance* (al-kitāb):** That is: The destroying of the towns or their severe chastisement is a sure decree that is written in "the book" (*al-kitāb*). This shows that *al-kitāb* here means the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) in which, according to the Qur'an, God has written everything. For example He says: *And We have recorded everything in a clear writing* (36:12); *And there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor any thing less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book* (10:61).

Some exegetes have a strange discussion here:

> Some scholars—more than one—have held that everything has been clearly outlined with all of its qualities, causes and allotted time in it, that is, in the Guarded Table and the Divine ordinance. Then the majority of scholars have objected to this view by saying that it entails the infiniteness of dimensions, while there is both transmitted and rational proof against it. Hence, there is no resolution but to make an exception to the apparent universality of the verse by saying that it only pertains to things in this realm [of matter] or another similar exception.
>
> Others have said that the verse can maintain its universality, but the way how everything is expressed in the Divine ordinance is such that it does not contradict the finiteness of dimensions. This means that the Guarded Tablet is similar to *al-jafr al-jāmi*ᶜ[1] in its inclusion of all past and future events in this world and the

1 This is an all-encompassing science based on the numerical symbolism of letters. It is one of the occult sciences (*al-ᶜulūm al-ghaybiyyah*) (Trans.)

Hereafter.

This discussion is based on the Tablet being a material tablet that is placed somewhere in the physical universe, and where the names, attributes and properties of all things are written, as well as every event that shall occur to them in every aspect according to their specific position in the general system that runs the universe.

But if it were to be a physical tablet as they have assumed, then it could not include the detailed names, attributes and descriptions of even its very material components, let alone including the other beings that only God can enumerate them along with their detailed attributes, states, what shall occur to them and the links between them. It is also clear that the proposed exception that what is meant is only the things in this world—or any other world—does not solve this problem either.

The view that the Tablet's inclusion of all things is like the inclusion of infinite things in a something finite—just as the letters of alphabet include all the infinitely possible words and writings—means that the events are included in the Guarded Tablet as potentialities and possibilities, or in a condensed form. However, God's description of this Tablet is explicit—or almost explicit—that the Tablet includes all things and events in the past, present or the future being actualized, differentiated, and characterized by a necessity that does not undergo any change. If their view were correct, then the any piece of paper with the letters of alphabet on it would have sufficed [as the Tablet].

This is not to mention that the very quality of something being physical and material means that it is changeable. Yet the Tablet is described as "Guarded" (*maḥfūẓ*), meaning that it is preserved from every possible change or transformation that can possibly be conceived. There is need for more solid evidence than what has been proposed to reconcile the ideas that the Tablet is both guarded and material. There are also other problems with the above discussion [that we will leave out].

The truth is that "the Clear Book" (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*) is the very "text"[1] of the existents with the events that occurs to them in the sense that an effect necessarily follows its cause. This is the divine decree (*qaḍā*ʾ) that does not fail or change—not from the aspect of the potentiality and contingence of matter. Calling it a "book" or a "tablet" is a symbolic expression

1 "Text" in the sense of being fixed at the level of their causes, not at their own levels. (Auth.)

to make this reality more tangible and comprehendible. We will discuss this topic in detail in its appropriate place, if God wills.

وَ ما مَنَعَنا أَنْ نُرْسِلَ بِالْآياتِ إِلاَّ أَنْ كَذَّبَ بِهَا الْأَوَّلُونَ وَ آتَيْنا ثَمُودَ النَّاقَةَ مُبْصِرَةً فَظَلَمُوا بِها وَ ما نُرْسِلُ بِالْآياتِ إِلاَّ تَخْوِيفاً ﴿٥٩﴾

(17:59) ***And nothing could have hindered Us that We should release signs except that the ancients rejected them; and We gave to Thamūd the she-camel—a manifest [sign]—but on her account they did injustice, and We do not send signs but to make (men) fear.***

The connection between this verse and the previous verse was discussed above. In short, the previous verse implies that all people—the later generations and the earlier ones alike—deserve destruction and other severe chastisements because of their disposition and instinct to corruption and sin. Thus God has decreed to destroy every town or to chastise it with a severe chastisement. Here God continues: This is exactly what hinders Us from sending the signs that they ask for, because We sent the requested signs of the ancient generations but they rejected them and therefore We destroyed them. These people [the current generation] have the same traits and disposition as their predecessors. Hence, if We send the signs that they press for, they will also reject them, and then destruction will befall them inevitably as it befell their predecessors. However, God does not want to hasten to their punishment.

This shows that these two verses are related to the verses below that describe their requested signs and miracles: *And they say: We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us* (17:90). The verses of this chapter show that they were apparently revealed together at once.

And nothing could have hindered Us* (manaʿanā, from manʿ) *that We should release* (nursila, from irsāl) *signs…: *Manʿ* means to stop and hinder someone from doing what he wants. God judges and no one can repel His judgment,[1] for He is the All-Dominant Conqueror. When He decrees something He only says to it "Be," and it is.[2] Therefore, when it is said that

1 See verse 13:41. (Trans.)

2 See verses 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, 36:82, 40:68. (Trans.)

the ancient nations' rejection of His signs have "hindered" Him from sending proposed signs anymore, it is meant in the sense that given their habit of rejection, sending signs would be devoid of any welfare or wisdom for a nation that God has not willed their chastisement and destruction, or that it would be devoid of any welfare for any nation because He knows that the majority of them will not believe in the requested signs.

Alternatively, you can say that *manᶜ* (hinderance) in this verse is used metaphorically to indicate that the later generations are pursuing the same path as the ancient ones, and they rejected the proposed signs which resulted in their extermination, while God's decree is to give respite to this nation.

Perhaps using the verb *irsāl* (release, issue, send) instead of *ītāʾ* (give) hints at the same point, because it is as if the signs have a disposition and tendency to come down, but their descent [that is, being released to descend] is hindered only by the rejection and corruption that is in the nature of the people.

…except that the ancients* (al-awwalūn) *rejected them…: Referring to the exterminated nations as *al-awwalūn* (lit. "the first ones") implies that the current nation is the last of a chain whose beginning was the exterminated nations. Therefore, they are a single nation, whose last ones have the same makeup and drives as their first ones, and what applied to the previous ones also applies to the subsequent ones. That is why they used to repeatedly say: *We have not heard of this among our fathers of yore* (23:24).

At any rate, the implied meaning is: We do not send the signs that they—the Quryash—have requested, because if We were to send them, they would not believe in them but would reject them, and thus they would qualify for an exterminating punishment. That would make them like the ancients, to whom We sent their proposed signs but they rejected them and therefore We destroyed them. However, We have decreed not to punish this nation except after some time and respite. This decree is understood from a few places in His Book.

The exegetes have suggested two other interpretations for this verse:

(1) We do not send the signs because We know that they will not believe, which makes the sending of the signs a vain and pointless action. That was the case with the previous nations, for they did not believe in the signs that were sent. This only applies to their proposed signs, but as with the signs that are needed to prove a prophet's messengership, God certainly gives them to His

messenger. Likewise, when there is an element of divine grace and mercy in sending a sign, He sends it out of His grace. However, in cases other than these two, there is no benefit in sending a sign.

(2) Your fathers and predecessors asked for signs much like what you are asking for, but they did not believe in them when the signs were sent. Now you are following their footsteps and example. That is why We do not send your proposed signs, for you will not believe in them as they did not. This interpretation is narrated from Abū Muslim.

It is difficult to differentiate between the second interpretation and the two discussed above,[1] because its meaning would essentially reduce to either of those.

…and We gave to Thamūd the she-camel–a manifest [sign]* (mubṣiratan) *but on her account they did injustice…: Thamūd was the tribe of Prophet Ṣāliḥ , which was given the she-camel as a sign. *Mubṣirah* means manifest and clear, as He says: *and We have made the sign–the day manifest (mubṣiratan)* (17:12). It is an adjective for the she-camel, or an adjective for an omitted noun: a manifest sign. The implied meaning is: We gave to Thamūd the she-camel which was clear and manifest, or which was a clear and manifest sign, but they did injustice to themselves through it, or they did injustice by rejecting it.

…and We do not send signs but to make (men) fear: That is: The wisdom behind sending signs is to warn and threaten. Signs that entail exterminating punishment involve warning of chastisement in this world, and the rest of the signs warn and threat chastisement in the Hereafter.

It is also quite likely that what is meant by "making people fear" is bringing about fear and awe by sending catastrophes that do not exterminate a society. This would relate to His words: *Or that He may not seize them by causing them to suffer gradual loss, for your Lord is most surely Compassionate, Merciful* (16:47). Hence, the implied meaning would be: We do not send their proposed signs because We do not want to chastise them by an exterminating chastisement, but We only send signs that would make them fear, so that as they see them they would guard themselves against punishments that are more severe and dreadful. This interpretation

1 The first interpretation was the lack of any welfare or wisdom in sending sings, and the second one was God's decree to give time and respite to the current generation. (Trans.)

has been ascribed to some of the previous exegetes.

وَ إِذْ قُلْنا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَ ما جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْناكَ إِلاَّ فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَ الشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَ نُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَما يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلاَّ طُغْياناً كَبِيراً ﴿٦٠﴾

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(17:60) ***And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men; and We did not make the vision [dream] which We showed you but a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Qur'an as well; and We cause them to fear, but it only adds to their great insolence.***

This verse consists of four parts. The meanings of their terms are clear, but the connection between these four parts is not fully elaborated. This is because of a concision in the middle two parts of the verse, where He does not explain what the vision that He showed His Prophet was. Neither is there anything elsewhere in His Book that could serve as an interpretation of this vision. There are some verses that talk about visions like 8:43 (*When Allah showed them to you in your dream as few; and if He had shown them to you as many you would certainly have become weak-hearted*) and 48:27 (*Certainly Allah had shown to His Messenger the vision with truth: you shall most certainly enter the Sacred Mosque*) but these verses relate to events that occurred after the migration, whereas the current verse of discussion was revealed in Mecca before the migration.

Similarly, one cannot know what is the "cursed tree in the Qur'an" that God has made "a trial for men," because there is nowhere in the Qur'an where God talks about a tree and then curses it. He has mentioned the Zaqqūm tree and described it as a trial in verses 37:62-63 (*…or the tree of Zaqqum? Surely We have made it to be a trial to the unjust*), but He has not cursed this tree in any of the verses where He has mentioned it. One may say that just the fact that this tree "grows in the bottom of the hell" [37:64] and is a means of chastisement for the wrongdoers makes it cursed, but if that is the case, then Hell itself and everything that God has prepared for the punishment of its people would be cursed, including the angels of chastisement whom God has referred to in verse 74:31 (*And We have not made the wardens of the fire others than angels, and We have not made their number but as a trial for those who disbelieve*). Yet, God has praised them by a very high praise where He says: *Over it [Fire] are angels stern*

and strong, they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded (66:6). Likewise, God has described the hands of the believers as a means of chastisement for the unbelievers where He says: *Fight them, Allah will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace* (9:14), but their hands are not cursed.

This shows that the verse is not intended to fully explain these two [middle] parts and clarify what is meant by the "vision" and the "cursed tree in the Qur'an" that has been made "a trial for men." Instead, what is intended is only a general hint and reminder according to the context of the verses.

The context of these verses may provide some insight into some aspects of these two matters—that is, the "vision" and the "cursed tree." The previous verses described the people by comparing their last ones to their first ones and their end to their beginning in terms of their neglect and rejection of God's signs and communications. It was mentioned that human societies shall all taste God's punishment one town after another and one group after another either by destruction or by a threatening punishment that does not destroy them. This thread of meaning is followed by the verses below (*And when We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam*; 17:61) about the story of Satan (Iblīs) and his astonishing influence in misleading the children of Adam.

This shows that the mentioned vision and cursed tree are things that will happen to the people—or have already happened to them—which will be a trial for the people, will result in their corruption, and will make transgression and defiance take root in them. This can be seen in the last part of the verse (*and We cause them to fear, but it only adds to their great insolence*) as well as its beginning (*And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men*).

In addition, God is saying that this tree is cursed "in the Qur'an," which shows that the Qur'an includes its curse. The apparent meaning of "the cursed tree in the Qur'an" is that its curse is to be found among the curses that exist in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an God has cursed Satan, the [unbelieving] Jews, the polytheists, the hypocrites, and other people such as those who die while they are disbelievers [2:161], those who conceal what God has revealed [2:159], those who offend God and His messenger [33:57], and so on.

What is cursed here is a "tree" (*shajarah*). *Shajarah* includes plants that have a stem, as well as any root that grows branches such as the pedigree

of an individual or the followers of a belief. *Lisān al-ʿArab* says: "When it is said that 'so-and-so is of a blessed *shajarah*,' it means that he has a blessed root [in terms of family background]." This meaning of *shajarah* is seen a lot in prophetic narrations. For example, he said, "I and ʿAlī are of the same tree (*shajarah*)." Along these lines is what he said when describing ʿAbbās: "One's uncle is the twin root (*ṣinw*) of his father."[1]

If one contemplates and reflects on the above points, it becomes clear to him that the cursed tree is one of the cursed groups in the Qur'an that are similar to a tree in terms of growing, branching out from a root, and having a share of life and fruition; a group that is a trial of misguidance for this *ummah*. Among the cursed groups in the Qur'an only three of them match these qualities: 1. the followers of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*); 2. the polytheists; and 3. the hypocrites. Their subsistence among the people and how they branch out can be either by reproduction and procreation—like a family in one of the three mentioned groups that would live among the people, corrupt the religious and worldly affairs of the people, and serve as a trial of misguidance to them—or by the emergence of a corrupt belief that is then followed by future generations who follow their ancestors.

Such description is not found among either the followers of the Book or the polytheists during the life of God's Messenger, whether before or after the migration. In fact, God assured the people [that is, Muslims] that they shall be secure from the harm of these groups in a verse that was revealed toward the end of the Prophet's life: *This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me* (5:3). We discussed the meaning of this verse in detail above. (Eng. vol. 10)

Reflecting on the above discussion would clarify to the reader that the "cursed tree" refers to a group of hypocrites who would pretend to be Muslims, grow their roots among the nation either by birth or belief [that is, conversion to Islam], and serve as a trial for the people. There is no doubt that the context of the verse alludes to a connection between the two middle parts of the verse: *"and We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Qur'an as well"* (17:60), especially if one keeps in mind that these two parts are preceded by *"And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men"* and followed by *"and We cause them to fear, but it only adds to their great*

1 *Ṣinwān* are two palm trees that grow from the same root. (Auth.)

insolence" (17:60).[1] The connection between the parts of this verse shows that the verse is concerned with some matter that God has encompassed, yet admonition and warning about it only creates more transgression.

It is inferred from this connection that God showed this cursed tree and some of its actions in Islam to His Prophet in a dream and now He is clarifying to him that this tree is a trial.

And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men…: Given the context of the verse, encompassment (*iḥāṭah*) here means an encompassment of knowledge (that is, omniscience). *"And when"* involves an implied omitted part. What is meant is: "And remember when We…" The verse is saying: And remember—following what was mentioned in the previous verses—that people are habitually inclined to persisting with the path of corruption and sin, and their descendants follow the example of their fathers in turning away from the remembrance of God and disregarding His signs. Since We told you that surely the knowledge of your Lord has encompassed men, He knows that this practice shall continue among them in the future as it did in the past.

…and We did not make the vision [dream] which We showed you but a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Qur'an as well…: Based on the above discussion, the implied meaning is: We did not make the cursed tree in the Qur'an—which you know by Our description—and what We showed you of their affairs in a dream except as a trial for the people. They are only to test and examine the people, and We have certainly encompassed them.

…and We cause them to fear, but it only adds to their great insolence: The pronouns "them" and "their" apparently refer to "men" (*al-nās*) in the previous part of the verse. What is meant by "causing them to fear" is threats and warnings by admonition and speech [in the Qur'an], or dreadful events and signs that are not exterminating punishments. The meaning is: We threaten the people, but these threats only increase them in transgression—and not any transgression, but great transgression. That is, not only do they not fear and stop their evil practices when We threaten them, but they respond to Our threats by further transgression and exaggerating in their enmity against the truth.

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1 That is, the first and last parts of the verse apparently pertain to both middle parts of the verse, and this shows that the two middle parts are related to one another. (Trans.)

The context of the verse is one of condolence, as several exegetes have noted. God is comforting His Prophet by saying that the affairs that He showed him and introduced to him are tribulations, and His custom has ever been to test and trial His servants by tribulations.

All of our discussions above are confirmed by what has been narrated through some Sunni sources and is unanimously narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt that the "vision" (*ruʾyā*) in this verse refers to a dream that the Prophet had about the Umayyads, and that the "tree" is their pedigree. You will see these narrations below in "Examining Narrations," by the will of God.

A group of exegetes have said—based on a narration from Ibn ʿAbbās—that "the vision that God showed to His Prophet" was His taking him on the night journey (*al-isrāʾ*), and the "cursed tree in the Qur'an" is the Zaqqūm tree. They have said that when the Prophet returned from his night journey and informed the polytheists about it [the Zaqqūm tree] they denied and ridiculed him. Likewise, they denied and ridiculed him when they heard the verses where God talks about Zaqqūm. Therefore, in this verse God is saying that the vision that We showed you—that is, the night journey and the Zaqqūm tree—are only made a trial for the people.

These exegetes have then faced an objection: that *ruʿyā* is a vision that a person sees in sleep (that is, dream), as lexicographers have specified, but the Prophet's night journey occurred when he was awake. To this, some have answered by saying that *al-ruʾyā* is an infinitive from the root *raʾā*—just like *al-ruʾyah*—and therefore it is not limited to the state of sleep. Others have said that *al-ruʾyā* is what one sees at night, whether in sleep or awake. Others have said that the night journey is called *al-ruʾyā* since the polytheists used to call it a dream. Some have said that it is only based on the impression and assumption of the polytheists, just as the Qur'an has called their idols "gods." It has been narrated that when the Prophet narrated the story of his night journey, some of them told him: "Perhaps that is something that you saw in sleep." This is why God has called it a "dream" (*ruʾyā*) just as He has called the idols "their gods." Others have said that the night journey is called *al-ruʾyā* because it was similar to a dream in the sense that it included strange visions, or due to its occurrence at night, or due to the speed of its occurrence. Some exegetes have said that the night journey was indeed in a dream, as it has been narrated from ʿĀʾishah and Muʿāwiyah.

They have also faced the objection that it does not make sense to call Zaqqūm a "cursed" tree because the tree itself is faultless. To this some

have answered by saying that what is meant by cursing the tree is in fact cursing those who eat from it, as a form of metonymy that is used to emphasize the degree of their cursedness. Others have said that curse (*laʿnah*) means being far, and the Zaqqūm tree is in the farthest place from God's mercy because it grows in the bottom of Hell [37:64]. Others have said that it is called cursed because its spathes are like the heads of devils [37:65] and the devils are cursed. Others have said that Arabs call any unpleasant and harmful food "cursed."

Concerning their claim that *al-ruʾyā* is an infinitive that is synonymous with *al-ruʾyah* (to see), as well as their claim that *al-ruʾyā* is anything that is seen at night, it should be noted that these claims are not supported by the lexical meaning of the term, and the exegetes have not provided any evidence from the Arabic literature—whether poem or prose—showing their claims. They have presented nothing but mere speculation.

Concerning the claim that the night journey is called *al-ruʾyā* (dream) because of what the polytheists used to say or suppose, it should be said that God's Book is certainly clear from expressions on such basis. If that were the case, then there must have been some evidence [in the verse] to show in what sense the term has been used, and that it is not an affirmation by Him the night journey was really a dream. Furthermore, He has never referred to their idols as "gods" (*ālihah*) or "partners" (*shurakāʾ*), but He has referred to them as "their gods" (*ālihatuhum*) and "their partners" (*li-shurakāʾihim*). He has always attributed these gods and idols to the polytheists, and this attribution is the best sign for non-acceptance. Similarly, concerning the claim that the night journey has been called a dream metaphorically, it would be like any other metaphorical expression that requires some indicative evidence for its usage. Had there been any evidence showing a metaphorical usage here, the advocators of the idea that the night journey occurred in a dream would not have relied on the term *al-ruʾyā* (dream, vision) in this verse to prove their point [but they have done so]. Of course, that is only assuming that the verse is about the night journey to begin with!

As with the view that the night journey indeed occurred in a dream, its falsity was shown at the beginning of this chapter, in exposition of the first verse.

Now let us assess the answers that they have given to why the tree is made cursed in the Qur'an. Concerning the view that the tree is cursed on the account of its consumers being cursed, it is true that such use of

expression is common in everyday conversations, but God's Book must be set clear from such metonymy. It is rather the habit and manner of the imprudent and ignoble individuals that when they want to curse someone they start cursing his father, his mother and his family with all exaggeration, and when they want to swear at someone they start uttering profanities about his wife, his daughter, the sky that shadows over him, the earth that holds him, the house that shelters him, and the community that he mingles with. The Qur'an's courtesy does not allow it to emphasize the cursedness of the people of Hell by cursing the tree whose fruit has been made a means of punishment for its eaters by God.

The view that curse (*al-laʿn*) means being far in its absolute sense and unconditionally is not supported by the lexical meaning of the term. Instead, what the lexicographers have specified—and is also found in the Qur'anic usage of the term—is that *laʿn* means being far from mercy and good. Concerning the view that the Zaqqūm tree is in a place that is farthest away from mercy as God has described: *A tree that-grows in the bottom of the hell* (37:64), it should first be clarified what is meant by "mercy." If they want to take mercy as Paradise, then they must provide a proof and evidence for it. If they say that it is mercy as opposed to punishment, then saying that this tree is cursed in the sense that it is farthest away from mercy and good would entail that Hell, all the punishments that God has prepared therein, as well as the guardian angels and the angels of punishment must all be cursed, under God's wrath, and far from mercy. However, none of these things are cursed. It is only the human beings and the jinn who are punished there that are cursed, under God's wrath, and far [from His mercy].

Concerning the claim that the tree is made cursed because its spathes are like the heads of devils [37:65] and the devils are cursed, it should be said that it would not be a real ascription but a metaphorical one. This meaning is not what one primarily understands from the verse, and it also suffers from the objection to the first view [that is, lack of indicative evidence for a metaphorical usage].

The claim that Arabs call any unpleasant and harmful food "cursed" involves a metonymy because the verse is saying "tree" but what is intended is its "fruit." Then it is saying that this fruit is cursed in the sense that it is unpleasant and harmful. In other words, it involves a metaphorical ascription of an attribute of the fruit—that is, "cursedness"—to the tree. Besides, it is not certain that one of the meanings of "cursed" is unpleasant and

harmful. Rather, it is apparently the other way around: That the Arabs use curse (*laʿn*) in its famous meaning, and then they curse anything that does not please them of food, drink, and so on.

Concerning the narration attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, even if the narration is correct, it is still not an authoritative proof (*ḥujjah*), especially given that it contradicts several narrations that involve the Prophet's interpretation, including one from ʿĀʾishah, which shall be presented below.

Al-Kashshāf says:

> *"And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men"* (17:60): That is, remember when We revealed to you that surely your Lord encompasses Quraysh, which means We gave you the glad tiding of the Battle of Badr and your victory over them. This promise is also seen in verses: *Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs* (54:45); *Say to those who disbelieve: You shall be vanquished, and driven together* (3:12), and other verses. The verse talks about this victory as if it has already happened, just as it is seen in other verses that inform about the [definite] future, and that is why it has used the past tense *aḥāṭa* (lit. "encompassed" or "has encompassed").
>
> When the two armies confronted each other on the day of Badr, the Prophet was under a shade with Abū Bakr and he supplicated to God as follows: "O God! I ask you your promise and pledge." Then he went out having an armor on, and started encouraging the people and saying: *Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs* (54:45).
>
> Perhaps God had shown him their falling places in a vision. When the Muslims arrived at the wells of Badr he said, "By God it is as if I see the place where they shall fall," and he used to point to different places and say, "This is where so-and-so shall die" and "This is where so-and-so shall fall." When the people of Quraysh [in the other army] heard about what God had revealed to His Messenger concerning the day of Badr and the falling places of the Quraysh that He had shown him in a vision, they started mocking, ridiculing and asking for its hastening in derision.
>
> And when they heard His words: *Surely the tree of the Zaqqum is the food of the sinful* (44:43-44), they made fun of it and said, "Muḥammad says that Hell burns stones but then he says that there is also a tree that grows in there!"

> …These verses were sent in order to threaten the people—they were threatened by being killed in the Battle of Badr as a worldly punishment.

He [al-Zamakhsharī] then mentions that some exegetes have interpreted "the vision" (*al-ruʾyā*) as the night journey. It is clear that he is not satisfied with their interpretation even though he has quoted it as a narration. That is why he has inclined to interpreting *al-ruʾyā* as the Prophet's vision of the Battle of Badr before its occurrence, followed by Quraysh's derision of it when they heard about it.

Even though he [al-Zamakhsharī] has avoided the problems of interpreting the vision as the night journey, he has fallen into another problem that is certainly no lesser—if not greater—than that. The problem is that he has interpreted *al-ruʾyā* according to an impression and speculation that he has thought to be likely—that the Prophet might have seen the Battle of Badr and the falling places of the enemy in a dream before its occurrence, which then served as a trial for Quraysh as they ridiculed him. He has not provided any proof for this view other than saying, "Perhaps God had shown him their falling places in a vision." How could he allow himself to interpret God's speech based on some imagined possibility that has no support, that is not backed by any argument, and that has no evidence from the verses of Qur'an to prove it?

Some exegetes have said that "the vision" here refers to the Prophet's dream that he shall enter Mecca and the Sacred Mosque, as God says in the verse: *Certainly Allah had shown to His Messenger the vision…* (48:27).

The problem with this view is that the Prophet had this vision after the migration and before the Peace Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, while the current verse was revealed in Mecca. We shall discuss this vision in detail later on by God's will [under verse 48:27].

Some exegetes have suggested that the cursed tree in the Qur'an is the Jews. This has been narrated from the exegete Abū Muslim.

We discussed above what could strengthen this view and what could weaken it.[1]

وَ إِذْ قُلْنا لِلْمَلائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ قالَ أَ أَسْجُدُ

1 The strength is that Jews have indeed been cursed in the Qur'an and they can be described as a "tree." The weakness is that according to verse 5:3 they are no longer a threat or trial. (Trans.)

لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِيناً ﴿٦١﴾

(17:61) ***And when We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam; they made obeisance, but Iblis (did it not). He said: Shall I make obeisance to him whom You have created of clay*** **(ṭīnan)?**

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> According to al-Zajjāj, *ṭīnan* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection because it is an adverb (*ḥāl*). It means: You created him while he was out of clay. There might also be an omitted particle *min* (lit. "from" or "of") here [that is, You created him of clay, or from clay]. Such omission is seen in the verse, "If you wish to engage a wet-nurse [for] your children (*awlādakum*)" (2:233) where what is meant is *li-awlādikum* (lit. "for your children"). It has also been said that *ṭīnan* is *manṣūb* because it serves as a distinction (*tamīz*)[1].

Al-Kashshāf has suggested that *ṭīnan* could describe the state (*ḥāl*) of "whom You have created" not the state of the object of the verb "created" as al-Zajjāj has said.[2] Others have said that *ṭīnan* cannot be an adverb (*ḥāl*) because it is *jāmid* (that is, not derived from another root).

This verse involves another reminder to the Prophet, about the story of Satan (Iblīs) and his conversation with God when he disobeyed the command to prostrate [to Adam]. It is intended to confirm what God stated above about the people—that they consistently disparage God's commands, defy the truth, and neglect the signs of God, and that they will continue to be like this. It is reminding the Prophet of Satan's story, of his pledge to bridle Adam's descendants, of God giving him authority over those children of Adam who obey him and follow his call and the call of his cavalry and infantry, and of Satan not making any exceptions

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1 In this case, *ṭīnan* (lit. "of clay") is meant to set Adam apart from other beings that are created from other than clay, particularly from Satan himself as a jinn. The emphasis would be on clay: You created him out of clay [not out of something else]. (Trans.)

2 This is a technical Arabic discussion that would make no difference to the English translation and meaning. It is about whether *ṭīnan* is *ḥāl* for the *mawṣūl* (that is, *li-man*) or for the *mafᶜūl* of *khalaqta* (which is omitted in the verse). (Trans.)

in his pledge except for God's chosen servants.

The implied meaning is: And remember when your Lord told the angels: "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated except Satan (Iblīs). Then it is presumably asked, "So what did Satan (Iblīs) do?" or "What did he say when he did not prostrate?" So it says [in response]: He rejected the command to prostration and said, "Shall I prostrate"—as a rhetorical question in disapproval—"to one whom You have created out of clay, while You have created me out of fire which is nobler than clay?"

What is presented here is an abridged version of the story because some parts of it are omitted. This abridgement is based on the context of these verses, because the purpose is to discuss the causes and factors that make the children of Adam to continue to sin and do injustice. The above verses first said that the ancient nations did not believe in the signs that they had proposed and requested, and that the later generations are also following their example and footsteps. Then it was said that there shall be other trials that will afflict this nation. Then here God reminds His Prophet about the story of Adam and Satan (Iblīs), which He has already narrated for him elsewhere. The story involves Satan's pledge to mislead Adam's descendants, his request from God to give him authority over them, and God's positive response to his request with regard to the deviators [that is, those who deviate themselves]. Therefore, it should not be a surprise if the majority of the people incline toward the path of error and misguidance, turn to injustice and transgression, and deviate from the signs and communications of God, because they have been besieged by God's tribulation from one side and by Satan along with his cavalry and infantry from another side.

قَالَ أَ رَأَيْتَكَ هذَا الَّذِى كَرَّمْتَ عَلَىَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلى يَوْمِ الْقِيامَةِ لَأَحْتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً ﴿٦٢﴾

(17:62) ***He said: Tell me*** **(araʾaytaka)*****, is this he whom You have honored above me? If You should respite me to the day of resurrection, I will most certainly bridle his progeny*** **(la-aḥtanikanna, from iḥtināk)** ***except a few.***

The letter *kāf* at the end of *araʾaytaka* is an extra letter that does not add to the meaning, but it is only used in addresses like demonstratives. "This he whom You have honored above me" refers to Adam, whom God

honored and preferred over Satan by commanding Satan to prostrate to him, and by driving Satan away [from His precinct and proximity] when he refused to do so.

This shows that Satan inferred from the command to prostration that Adam has been honored over him. He made a similar inference when the angels told God: *What! will You place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood?* (2:30), which dared him to intend to misguide Adam's descendants. Our exposition of that verse would prove helpful here.

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *iḥtināk* means cutting something from its root. When it is said that someone *iḥtanaka* so-and-so's wealth or knowledge, it means that he took it all from him.[1] *Iḥtanaka al-jarād al-mazraʿ* means that the locusts ate up the entire farm. Others have said that when someone ties a rope to the lower jaw (*ḥanak*) of an animal and pulls it, it is said: *ḥanaka al-dābbata bi-ḥablihā*. This is apparently the root meaning of the term. Therefore, *iḥtināk* means to bridle (*iljām*).

The implied meaning is: When Satan sinned and became subject to the divine wrath, he said: "My Lord! About this person whom You honored by commanding me to prostrate to him and driving me away for not doing so, I swear that if You respite me to the Day of Resurrection—which is the duration of the children of Adam's stay in earth—I will bridle his progeny except a few—a few being Your chosen servants (*al-mukhlaṣūn*)."

قالَ اذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزاؤُكُمْ جَزاءً مَوْفُوراً ﴿٦٣﴾

(17:63) *He said: Be gone* (idhhab)*! for whoever of them will follow you, then surely hell is your recompense, a full recompense* (mawfūran).

The imperative *idhhab* (lit. "go!") is not really an order, but it is said when one is being left on his own. It is like when you say to someone who opposes you, "Do whatever you want." Some exegetes have suggested that it is indeed a real order, and it is a different expression for what He has said elsewhere: *He said: Then get out of it, for surely you are driven away* (15:34). *Mawfūr* means complete or full. A full recompense is a remuneration that is paid in full, without any bit of it being put aside. The meaning of the verse is clear.

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1 In case of knowledge it would mean benefiting from one's knowledge, but not stripping him of it. (Trans.)

وَ اسْتَفْزِزْ مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصَوْتِكَ وَ أَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِمْ بِخَيْلِكَ وَ رَجِلِكَ وَ شارِكْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْوالِ وَ الْأَوْلادِ وَ عِدْهُمْ وَ ما يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطانُ إِلاَّ غُرُوراً ﴿٦٤﴾

(17:64) *And entice* (istafziz, from istifzāz) *whomsoever of them you can with your voice, and collect* (ajlib, from ijlāb) *against them your forces riding* (bi-khaylika) *and on foot* (rajilika), *and share with them in wealth and children, and hold out promises to them; and Satan makes not promises to them but to deceive.*

Istifzāz means to push, shove and arouse something swiftly and quickly. *Ijlāb*, according to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, is to drive something [from behind] by *jalabah*, which is a loud cry.

Al-Mufradāt says:

> The root meaning of *jalb* is to drive something [from behind] (*al-sawq*). It is used as *jalabtu jalban*. In a poem it says: "The pool pulls (*yajlibu*) things that are far [that is, it drives them toward itself]." *Ajlabtu ʿalayhi* means "I cried and called over him with harshness." God says: *And collect against them your forces riding and on foot* (17:64).[1]

It has been said that the real meaning of *khayl* means "horses," but there is no singular for it from the same root. Sometimes it is used to refer to riders on horses metaphorically. *Rajil* is the same as *rājil*, just as *ḥadhir* is the same as *ḥādhir* (careful) and *kamil* is the same as *kāmil* (complete). *Rājil* is the opposite of rider (*rākib*). Its contrast with *khayl* shows that here it means is the infantry of an army.

And entice whomsoever of them you can with your voice…: That is: Tempt anyone of Adam's descendants that you can to disobedience by your voice. Those would be the people who accept Satan's authority and follow him, as stated in Chapter 15.[2] Apparently tempting and stimulating by voice is a metaphorical way of talking about goading one by false whispers and ideas that are devoid of all truth. Satan's call has been

1 The meaning used in translation—"collect against them"—is a direct consequence of calling his cavalry and infantry against mankind. (Trans.)

2 See verses 15:42 and 16:100.

compared to driving sheep and other animals from behind by shouting and yelling sounds of no meaning.

…and collect against them your forces riding and on foot…: That is: Call and shout over them to drive them to God's disobedience by means of your assistants and armies, whether mounted or on foot. This expression apparently implies that Satan's crew and assistants compose of some who do their job quickly—like riders in a battle—and other who are used in attacks that do no t demand speed—like the infantry. Therefore, cavalry and infantry metaphorically mean those who are quick and those who are slow in action, respectively. The analogy is to show how they perform their actions.

…and share with them in wealth and children…: *Shirkah* (association, cooperation, sharing) applies to possession and property. It necessitates that the associates or partners would each have a share in the benefit which is sought in wealth and children. Wealth is a property that is separate from the person, and likewise a child is a totally independent individual from his parents. Had it not been for the purpose of benefiting from them, human beings would neither consider wealth as property nor claim the ascription of children solely to themselves.

Satan's association with mankind in their wealth or children means his partaking in their ownership and benefit. One example is when one earns wealth—which God has made a means of fulfilling the natural needs of mankind—through unlawful means. The person's benefit from this is the fulfillment of his natural needs, and Satan's benefit is that it is unlawful. Another possibility is when one earns money lawfully but spends it in a way against God's obedience. This is also a benefit for both of them, while the person will be empty-handed from God's mercy. An example of sharing with mankind in their children is when people beget children in an unlawful way, or when the child is legitimately born but he is raised in an improper manner and disciplined in a way that is not pleasing to God. There are other examples similar to these.

What we said is a plausible interpretation for the verse and it encompasses the various interpretations suggested by the exegetes. For instance, some of them have said that the wealth in which Satan partakes is any wealth that is earned unlawfully and acquired without any right; and the children in which he partakes include every child that is born out of wedlock. This is how Ibn ʿAbbās and others have interpreted the verse. Another interpretation narrated from Qatādah is: His sharing in their

wealth is that he orders them to set their animals as *sāʾibah*, *baḥirah*, and so on,[1] and his sharing in their children is that they make their children Jews, Christians and Magians.

Some have narrated from al-Kalbī: He has a share in unlawful incomes and unlawful intercourse. Others have said that Satan's share in their children is when they name their children ʿAbd Shams (lit. "servant of the sun"), ʿAbd al-Ḥārith (lit. "servant of Ḥārith")[2] and so on. Others have said that his share in their children is the daughters that they used to bury alive, as narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās. Another view is that his sharing in their wealth is to have them make offerings for their gods, as narrated from al-Ḍaḥḥāk. There are further [similar] interpretations narrated from the early exegetes.

***…and hold out promises to them; and Satan makes not promises to them but to deceive* (ghurūran):** That is: He does not promise to them except a deceitful promise, for he shows error in the form of rightness and falsehood in the shape of truth. *Ghurūr* is an infinitive (lit. "to deceive") but here it serves as an active noun [that is, something that deceives]. Such usage [of an infinitive instead of an adjective] is to emphasize the extent and intensity of deception.

إِنَّ عِبادِی لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطانٌ وَ كَفى بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلاً ﴿٦٥﴾

(17:65) ***Surely (as for) My servants, you have no authority over them; and your Lord is sufficient as a Protector.***

That is: God is sufficient as One Who watches over them and their actions, looks after their welfare, and controls their affairs. This is because a wakīl is one who takes care of the affairs of someone else, takes his place in direction and management, and runs his life. This shows that what is meant here is God's special guardianship for non-deviators among His servants, as discussed in Chapter 15 [15:42].

We already had different discussions concerning the story of

1 These are titles for animals that the polytheists used to honor and not slaughter after certain years of delivery. Satan would have a share in this because it is making unlawful what God has made lawful. See verse 5:103 for a full account of these animals and this custom. (Trans.)

2 According to some narrations Ḥārith was a name of Iblīs. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 11:251-253, 54:323, 60:195, 60:226. (Trans.)

prostration to Adam in Chapters 2, 7 and 15 that would provide much insight to the current verses.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 17:58 (*And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the day of resurrection*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "This is about dying, whether through natural death or otherwise." In another narration about the verse he said: "It means destroying by being killed, dying or other forms of death."[1]

Author's comment: It is likely that these hadiths pertain to the entire verse.

(2) Concerning verse 17:59 (*And nothing could have hindered Us that We should release signs…*) one of the Infallibles said: It was revealed about Quraysh.[2]

(3) About the same verse Imam al-Bāqir said: Muḥammad's tribe asked him to show them a sign. Then Gabriel descended upon him and said: "Surely God says: *And nothing could have hindered Us that We should release signs except that the ancients rejected them* (17:59); likewise if We send a sign to Quraysh and they do not believe in it then We will destroy them. That is why We withhold from sending signs to your people."[3]

(4) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The people of Mecca asked the Prophet to turn Mount al-Ṣafā to gold for them, and to push the mountains [surrounding Mecca] back so that they can cultivate the land. He was told [by God]: "If you want We can delay their request, and if you want We can give them what they have asked for, but then if they deny they will be destroyed as the nations before them were destroyed." He [the Prophet] said: "I rather a respite for them." Then God revealed this verse: *And nothing could have hindered Us that We should release signs except that the ancients rejected them* (17:59).[4]

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ibn Sinān.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Nasāʾī, al-Bazzāz, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim—who has authenticated it, Ibn

Author's comment: There are other narrations to this effect through other chains.

(5) The Messenger of God saw in a dream that the children of so-and-so were jumping on his pulpit like monkeys. That grieved him such that he was not seen laughing again until he died. That is when God revealed: *And We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men* (17:60).[1]

(6) Ibn ʿUmar said: The Prophet said, "I dreamt the children of al-Ḥakam b. al-ʿĀṣ on pulpits like monkeys." It was about this dream that God revealed: *And We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Qur'an as well* (17:60), where the tree means al-Ḥakam and his children.[2]

(7) Yaʿlā b. Murrah said: The Messenger of God said, "I was shown in a vision the children of Umayyah [that is, the Ummayads] on the pulpits of the earth. They shall soon take you in their possession and you will find them to be evil masters." This really grieved the Messenger of God and that is why God revealed: *And We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men* (17:60).[3]

(8) Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī said: Once the Messenger of God was seen anxious. He was asked, "What is wrong, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "I saw in a dream that the Umayyads were taking turns on my pulpit." They told him: "O Messenger of God! Do not worry, for that is only a share of this world that they will have." That is when God revealed: *And We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men* (17:60).[4]

(9) Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab said: The Messenger of God once dreamt the Umayyads on the pulpits and that grieved him. Then God revealed to him that this is only this world [that is, a temporary reign and power] that they will be given, and this consoled him. This is the interpretation of what He says: *And We did not make*

Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil* and al-Ḍiyāʾ's *al-Mukhtārah*.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of Sahl b. Saʿd.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

the vision which We showed you but a trial for men (17:60), where trial means tribulation (*balāʾ*).[1]

Author's comment: This narration is also reported in *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Thaʿlabī's *Tafsīr*, narrated from Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab through an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

(10) The Messenger of God said, "I saw in a dream that the children of al-Ḥakam—or the children of al-ʿĀṣ—are jumping on my pulpit like monkeys." This enraged God's Messenger, and he was not seen happy and laughing again after that until he died.[2]

(11) Once ʿĀʾishah told Marwān b. al-Ḥakam: I heard the Messenger of God saying to your father and grandfather, "You are the cursed tree in the Qur'an."[3]

(12) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: The Prophet's vision was that he saw monkeys going up and down his pulpit, which grieved and depressed him. Thus has been narrated from Sahl b. Saʿīd, on the authority of his father. *Majmaʿ* then adds: This has also been narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq. Based on this hidden interpretation (*taʾwīl*) it has been said that the "cursed tree in the Qur'an" is the Umayyads.

Author's comment: This is not a hidden interpretation (*taʾwīl*), but it is directly inferred from what has been revealed, as discussed above, unless what is meant is *taʾwīl* in its general sense, which is used for all interpretation.

This has also been narrated by al-ʿAyyāshī in his *Tafsīr* on the authority of many reliable transmitters such as Zurārah, Ḥamrān , Muḥammad b. Muslim, Maʿrūf b. Kharrabūdh, Salām al-Juʿfī, al-Qāsim b. Sulaymān, Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ashall, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qaṣīr, from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq. ʿAyyāshī has also narrated it on the authority of Abū al-Ṭufayl, from Imam ʿAlī. al-Qummī has narrated this idea in his *Tafsīr* implicitly.[4]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾl* and Ibn ʿAsākir.

2 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, quoting from the book Faḍīlat al-Ḥusayn, from Abū Hurayrah with an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

4 That is, without specifying the name of the Imam and the chain of narration. (Trans.)

In some of these narrations there are others mentioned besides the Umayyads, which should be clear given our exposition above. We also reported some narrations under the verse *And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree* (14:26) that the "evil tree" refers to two most sinful groups or individuals from Quraysh.[1]

(13) Concerning verse 17:60 (*And We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men*) Ibn ʿAbbās said: This is not about a vision in a dream, but it refers to a vision by the eye [that is, in wakefulness] which the Messenger of God was shown on the night when he was taken on the night journey to Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis), and "the cursed tree in the Qur'an" (17:60) is the Zaqqūm tree.[2]

Author's comment: This narration has also been narrated from Ibn Saʿd, Abū Yaʿlā and Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Umm Hānī. Its implausibility was discussed in our exposition above.

(14) Concerning the same verse Ibn ʿAbbās said: When the Messenger of God was in Medina he once dreamt that he and his Companions were entering Mecca. So he set out for Mecca, however the dream was not due to be fulfilled that year, and thus the polytheists made him go back. As the Muslims returned from Mecca they started saying among themselves, "But how come he [the Prophet] was telling us that he will certainly enter Mecca?" Therefore this became a trial for them.[3]

Author's comment: The problem with this interpretation was discussed above in exposition, not to mention that it contradicts the previous narration.

(15) The Messenger of God said: "Indeed God has made Paradise

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1 There are two different opinions on this. According to reports attributed to Imam ʿAlī the two individuals understood to be the most sinful (*al-afjarān*) from Quraysh are ʿAmr b. Hishām al-Makhzūmī, a.k.a Abū Jahl, and ʿUtbat b. Rabīʿa. Other reports name the two tribes of Ummayah and al-Mughirāh as being the "two most sinful ones" that are meant here. Markaz al-Muṣṭafā lil-dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, *Āyāt al-Ghadīr* (Qum: Markaz al-Muṣṭafā, 1409), pp. 357-358. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh and Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh.

forbidden to every foul-mouthed swearer that has little shame, who cares neither about what he says nor about what is said about him. If you investigate about such individuals you will indeed find that they are either of illegitimate birth or an associate of Satan." Then someone asked, "O Messenger of God! Does Satan have associates among mankind?" He said, "Have you not read God's words: *And share with them in wealth and children* (17:64)." The man asked, "Is there anyone who does not care about what he says or what is said about him?" The Prophet answered, "Yes, that is one who bothers with the people and talks evil about them even though he knows that they will not let him get away with it [that is, they will also speak evil about him]. That is a person who does not care about what he says or what is said about him."[1]

16. Muḥammad b. Muslim said: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about Satan's share in the verse, *And share with them in wealth and children* (17:64). He said: "Any unlawful wealth is Satan's share." He then continued: "He [that is, Satan, or the wealth] stays with the person until he comes to his wife and therefore it becomes a part of his seed. The same is true about a man's seed if it is unlawful."[2]

Author's comment: There are many narrations to this effect, and they provide instances and applications of the general meaning of the verse that was discussed above in exposition.

What is said about his partaking in a man's intercourse, seed or the like is a metaphorical way of saying that he has a share in all of these. It is a symbolic expression to convey the intended meaning, the like of which is very common in the narrations.

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1 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd in the book *al-Zuhd*, on the authority of ʿUthmān b. ʿĪsā, on the authority of ʿUmar b. Udhaynah, on the authority of Sulaymān b. Qays, on the authority of Imam ʿAlī.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

Verses 66-72

These verses complement the previous verses by asserting that God answers the calls and removes distress, as opposed to their idols and objects of worship that cannot do so, as stated in the verses above. The previous set of verses started with *Say: Call on those whom you assert besides Him, so they shall not control the removal of distress from you nor (its) transference* (17:56), and this set of verses starts with: *Your Lord is He Who speeds the ships for you in the sea…* (17:66)

Each of the two sets of verses is a complete argument in proving their intended conclusions. The first set refutes the divinity of their gods, and the second set proves the divinity of God. Yet, we describe the second set as a complement to the first as the first set starts with "Say" (17:56) but not the second set.[1] It seems that both sets together compose one line of debate that the Prophet was ordered to deliver to the polytheists to make them accept monotheism.

This objective [of proving monotheism] can also be seen in the trend of the set of verses before the last, starting with: *Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of the Throne* (17:42), followed by: *And they say: What! when we shall have become bones… Say: Become stones or iron* (17:49-50).

The current set of verses end with, *The day when We will call every people by their Imam…* (17:71), indicating that what is discussed here about the guidance and misguidance of the people will accompany them in the Hereafter. That is, the second realm matches the first realm; thus, whoever sees in this world will see in the Hereafter, and whoever is blind in the first realm will be blind in the Hereafter and more erring from the way.

Commentary

رَبُّكُمُ الَّذِي يُزْجِي لَكُمُ الْفُلْكَ فِي الْبَحْرِ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيماً ﴿٦٦﴾

1 In other words, "Say" marks the beginning of a new discussion, which continues into the current set of verses. (Trans.)

(17:66) ***Your Lord is He Who speeds*** **(yuzjī, from izjāʾ)** ***the ships*** **(al-fulk)** ***for you in the sea that you may seek of*** **(min)** ***His grace*** **(faḍlihi)*; surely He is ever Merciful to you.***

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *izjāʾ* means to move and drive something from one state to another. What is meant here is making the ships to flow in the seas by sending winds and other forces, and making water wet and liquid such that it opens up and can be flown on. *Fulk* is the plural of *falkah*, which means *safīnah* (ship).

"Seeking God's grace" means seeking sustenance and livelihood. The *faḍl* (bounty, grace) of something is what is excess to it and remains of it extra. It is called seeking God's excess because a generous giver usually gives what remains beyond his own needs. Particle *min* (lit. "from" or "of") is *ibtidāʾiyyah*, but it could also be held as *tabʿīḍiyyah*.[1] The end of the verse justifies what is said in the verse by God's mercy. The meaning of the verse is clear, and the verse serves as an introduction and preparation for the next verse.

وَ إِذا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلاَّ إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَ كانَ الْإِنْسانُ كَفُوراً ﴿٦٧﴾

(17:67) ***And when distress*** **(al-ḍurr)** ***afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call on except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn aside; and man is ever ungrateful.***

Ḍurr means harm. Being afflicted by distress in the sea means coming close to drowning due to violent waves, turbulent winds and so on.

…away go **(ḍalla, from ḍalāl)** ***those whom you call on*** **(tadʿūna, from duʿāʾ)** ***except He…:*** As the exegetes have said, *ḍalāl* (going away) here does not mean losing the way and being misled from the path, but it means going away from one's mind. It has also been said that it means loss. When it is said that something *ḍalla* from so-and-so it means that he missed and lost it. Either way, it means to forget.

"Calling" (*duʿāʾ*) here means calling to request something, not

1 The current translation is based on *min* being *ibtidāʾiyyah*. It indicates the source of grace that is sought: That you may seek of or from His grace. *Min tabʿīḍiyyah* (lit. "discriminatory") would mean: That you may seek some part and share of His grace. (Trans.)

necessarily calling as a form of worship. Therefore, "those whom you call on" includes both the true God and the false gods that the polytheists used to call on and request from. This makes the exception connected (*muttaṣil*).[1] The implied meaning is: When things become difficult to you in the sea by coming close to drowning, you forget every god that you ask and request your needs from except for God.

Some exegetes have suggested that calling here means worship, not request, which the polytheists used to make only to their gods, not to God. Therefore, the exception would be a disconnected one and the implied meaning would be: When distress afflicts you in the sea you forget every god that you used to worship besides God, yet God will not slip from your minds and you do not forget him.

However, it seems that *ḍalāl* has its usual meaning, which is the opposite of guidance. Its usage here involves an elegant symbolism. When distress afflicts someone in the sea and it occurs to him to call for help, then it is as if the gods whom he used to call on before and constantly request from aim toward his heart, rushing toward him and competing with one another to reach him first so that he may remember them, call them and ask them for help. However, in doing so they all miss their path and fail to reach his memory. Thus, the person forgets all of them, and, as a result, his attention is drawn to God, Who is ever witnessed by the heart and present in the mind, except that the person had turned away from Him. Then God answers his call and rescues him to the land.

Based on this meaning, *ḍalāl* has its usual meaning (that is, misguidance, losing the way), and "those whom you call on" only includes their false gods that they call on besides God. This makes the exception disconnected, because the implied analogy that makes the basis of the verse does not befit God's sanctity for He is clear from rushing, following a path and so on.

Furthermore, the subsequent part of the verse (but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn aside) clearly shows that what is meant by "calling" is request, because in normal conditions—other than the state of distress—the polytheists are neglectful of God and do not call Him to

1 A connected exception (*al-istithnāʾ al-muttaṣil*) is when what is excepted is one of the members of what is excepted from. This is in contrast to a disconnected exception (*al-istithnāʾ al-munfaṣil*), which has the form of an exception but it can be broken into two independent statements. (Trans.)

request anything from Him. *Tadʿūna* in present tense indicates continuous calling, which applies only to their gods whom they used to call besides God. That is why the exception is a disconnected one.

…but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn aside…: That is: When He saves you from drowning and removes your distress by bringing you safely to the land, you turn aside from Him or from calling Him anymore. This involves a subtle hint that God is never absent from mankind's inmost conscience under no circumstance whatsoever, and that one's primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) leads him to call Him equally in sorrow, happiness, difficulty and ease. This is because "turning aside" (*iʿrāḍ*) is only perceivable when there is something present but the person turns aside from it. Saying that "mankind call God in distress but then turn aside from Him after His removal of the distress" is equivalent to saying that mankind's primary nature is always pointing to His direction.

…and man is ever ungrateful: That is: Ingratitude is a custom of mankind because their human nature is tied to the apparent means and instruments, such that they forget the real Cause and Creator of these means. As a result they fail to thank Him despite being immersed in His apparent and hidden blessings.

Ending the verse with this statement clarifies that mankind's turning aside from their Lord at times when they are not in distress is not their normal state as dictated by their primary nature. Therefore, this forgetfulness cannot be used as evidence for denying God's Lordship, because it is an evil habit of mankind that makes them ungrateful to God's blessings.

This verse involves a proof for God's unity in Lordship. It is essentially saying that when mankind are cut off from all apparent means and despair of them all, they are still not cut off from all causes in reality and do not completely despair of the chance of being saved. Instead, their heart inclines and clings to a cause that is capable of what no other means is capable of. This natural inclination does not make sense unless there is indeed a cause that is above all other causes, to Whom all affairs return, and that is God. It is only that one is turned aside from Him by his engagement with the ornaments of this life, his attachment to the apparent means of this world, and his heedlessness of what is beyond them.

أَ فَأَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يَخْسِفَ بِكُمْ جانِبَ الْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حاصِباً ثُمَّ لا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ وَكِيلاً ﴿٦٨﴾

(17:68) ***What! Do you then feel secure that He will not cause a tract of land to engulf*** **(yakhsifa, from khusūf)** ***you or send on you a tornado*** **(ḥāṣiban)*****? Then you shall not find a protector for yourselves.***

The *khusūf* of moon is when its disc is covered by darkness and shadow (that is, lunar eclipse). If the earth is to *yakhsifa* someone it means that it covers him (that is, swallows him). According to *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, *ḥāṣib* is a wind that comes with tiny pebbles and gravel. It has also been said that ḥāṣib is a deadly wind in land, as opposed to *qāṣif* which is a deadly wind in sea [mentioned in the next verse].

The question in this verse is a rhetorical one with a tone of rebuke. God censures them for ceasing to call Him in land even though they have no clue about what will happen to them later, and they have no protector against the perils of the land just as they do have no protector against the perils of the sea. It is very well possible that God may cause a tract of land to engulf and swallow them, or to send a tornado upon them and thus destroy them. If so, then they will not have any protector to deflect that distress and affliction from them, and to restore their peace and safety.

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يُعِيدَكُمْ فِيهِ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ فَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ قَاصِفًا مِنَ
الرِّيحِ فَيُغْرِقَكُمْ بِمَا كَفَرْتُمْ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا بِهِ تَبِيعًا ﴿٦٩﴾

(17:69) ***Or, do you feel secure that He will (not) take you back into it*** **(fīhi)** ***another time, then send on you a fierce gale*** **(qāṣifan, from qaṣf)** ***and thus drown you on account of your ungratefulness? Then you shall not find any aider*** **(tabīᶜan)** ***against Us in the matter*** **(bihi).**

Qaṣf is to break and shatter something severely. *Qāṣif* is a wind that breaks the ships and buildings. It has also been said that *qāṣif* is a deadly wind in the sea. *Tabīᶜ* is the same as *tābiᶜ* (lit. "follower"), which is something or someone that follows another. *Fīhi* ("into it") refers to the sea, and *bihi* ("in the matter") refers to "drowning" or to "the sending of a wind"—or to both of them in the sense that they are both things that happened before. Each of these views is held by some of the exegetes. This verse completes the rebuke above.

The implied meaning is: What makes you feel so assured and secure

when you are rescued to the land that God will not take you back to the sea once again and send a deadly wind or a fierce gale upon you that would break your ship and thus drown you for your ingratitude? In that case, you will not find anyone who would follow and prosecute God on the case of your drowning and ask Him why He did this to you, or would blame Him for what He has done.

…Then you shall not find any aider against Us in the matter: This sentence involves switching from the third person to the majestic plural as a way of showing glory and grandeur to the audience that fits the context here. It is also a preparation for the following verses that are in majestic plural.

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٧٠﴾

(17:70) ***And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have provided them with good things, and We preferred them greatly over many of those whom We have created.***

This verse is to be read in a context of describing God's favor and grace, coupled with a sense of admonition. It adds to God's abundant and consecutive bounties, blessings and mercy upon mankind, such as carrying them in the sea so that they may seek of His grace and sustenance, and giving them security in the land. Yet mankind ungratefully forget their Lord and turn aside from calling Him once He saves them and removes their distress, despite being continuously immersed in His countless blessings. This verse summarizes God's grace and favor upon mankind in order to show how much care and kindness He has for the people, and how ungrateful they are despite the abundance and extent of His blessings.

Based on the above explanation, it should be clear that the verse describes all mankind. It is not about the specific divine honor, excellence and proximity of some of the people who have excelled in purely spiritual matters. Rather, the verse includes the polytheists, the unbelievers and the sinners; otherwise it would not complement the context of both showing favor and rebuke

And surely We have honored **(karramnā, from takrīm)** ***the children of Adam…:*** Honor (*takrīm*) here means to have a special care and attention

for something, to give it a particular grace and position that is not found in other things. This marks the difference between *takrīm* (honor) and *tafḍīl* (preferment), because the former is an absolute act but the latter is relative. *Takrīm* is to endow someone with value and status in of himself, while *tafḍī*l is to give someone an endowment more than the others in a context where everyone receives some level of endowment. Mankind are exclusively endowed with the power of intellection (*ʿaql*), while they are also endowed with more in all other qualities, states and actions that are common between them and the other beings. To see this difference, it suffices to compare mankind with the other beings in terms of diversity of food, drink, clothes, housing and marriage. Furthermore, human beings are endowed with social organization, and they employ other beings in the universe as means to their ends. Compared to this, other beings—animals, plants, and so on,—are devoid of these qualities, except for a simple and limited degree of planning and direction which is and has been fixed in them since they were created without any observable evolution. This is while mankind has excelled in all aspects of their life to very far frontiers and is ever striving and advancing.

In short, the children of Adam are honored by what God has exclusively bestowed upon them among all other existents in the universe. This bestowment that makes them stand out among others is the intellect, by which they distinguish between true and false, good and evil, beneficial and harmful.

Other points of difference mentioned by the exegetes or the narrations are rather specific examples and illustrations [of their honor and preferment]. For example, it has been said that God has honored mankind by the power of speech, an upright posture [standing on too feet], fingers by which they can perform a variety of tasks, eating by the hand, writing, facial beauty, dominance over other creatures, the subservience of other beings for the benefit of mankind, the creation of their father Adam by God's hand, and Muḥammad being chosen from among them.

Some of these are consequences of the power of intellection, such as the ability to speak and write, or dominance over other creatures. Some others are examples of *tafḍīl* (preferment) as opposed to *takrīm* (honor)—the difference between the two was discussed above. Some others are beyond the scope of the verse, such as the creation of their father Adam by God's hand, and the assignment of Muḥammad from among them, because these are otherworldly honors and spiritual favors, which

fall outside the context of the verse, as we clarified above.

This also clarifies the claim that honor in this verse includes all of the above examples. After reporting a list of proposed interpretations, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* says:

> All of these are examples and applications of this honor. Those who have claimed that honor here means only one of these meanings—such as Ibn ʿAṭiyyah who says that mankind's honor is only by the intellect and nothing else—have made an erroneous claim, have missed the meaning, and have opposed the clear rule of reason (*ʿaql*) and authentic traditions (*naql*).

The problem with this view should be clear given the above discussions.

…and We carry them in the land and the sea: That is: We carry them on the back of ships, animals, and so on, which they ride in order to seek the grace and sustenance of their Lord. This is one of the manifestations of their honor.

…and We have provided them with good things: That is: We have given them of things that they find pleasing such as a variety of fruits and crops, and anything else that they enjoy and benefit from, including all forms of sustenance (*rizq*). This is another manifestation of their honor. An analogy for this honor is the case of someone who has been invited to a hospitable reception, which is itself an honor; then the host sends an animal that he can mount and ride to the reception, which is a further honor; and then he is offered a variety of delicious foods and enjoyable dishes, which is yet another honor.

This shows that when the verse adds *"and We carry them… and We have given them"* to *"surely We have honored,"* it is a case of stating a general concept and then adding its specific instances and examples that are derived from it.

…and We preferred them greatly over most* (kathīr) *of those whom We have created: It is possible that "those whom We have created" refers to different species of intelligible animals and the jinn—which has been asserted [to exist] by the Qur'an. This is because God counts different species of animals as communities (sing. *ummah*), much like human communities, and talks about them as it talks about intelligible beings. For example He says: *And there is no animal that walks upon the earth nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) genera like yourselves; We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord shall they be gathered* (6:38). This complies more with the meaning of the verse [than

including the angels among "those whom We have created"]. As we said, the verse intends to explain how God has honored the children of Adam and preferred them over the other beings in the physical world, which, to the extent that we know, consists of animals and the jinn. As with the angels, they are not among existential beings that are subject to the material system that governs the physical world and the realm of nature.

The implied meaning is: We have preferred the children of Adam over many of those whom We have created, which are the animals and the jinn. The creatures that do not fall under "many" (*kathīr*) would be the angels, and they are not really a subject of discussion in this verse because they are transcendent and immaterial beings that do not fall under the material system of the world. The verse only concerns mankind in the sense that they are one of the species in the physical world, and in this context God has graced them with both absolute and relative blessings.

Two points should be clear by now given the above discussions:

The first point is that both honor (*takrīm*) and preferment (*tafḍīl*) in this verse pertain to a divine gift to mankind. His honoring of mankind is by giving them something that has not been given to the other creatures, and that is the intellect which tells apart good from evil, beneficial from harmful, and virtue from vice. This consequently leads to other blessings such as dominance over the other creatures, employment of other beings in the way of their own goals, speech, writing, and so on. His preferment of mankind is what He has given mankind more relative to the other beings in things that are common between them. For example, what animals eat is the meat, fruit, grains or herbs that they find in its simple and unprocessed form. However, while human beings eat these things, they excel that by the variety of cooked and uncooked foods that they have developed in different, original and creative ways. They indulge in pleasant and delicious dishes that are innumerable and are ever being added to in terms of type and variety. Likewise is the case of their drinks, clothes, housing, mating, family organization, social systems, and so on.

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> It could be that *takrīm* and *tafḍīl* are the same. Then one might question: If that is so, then would it not make the verse repetitive? The answer is: "We have honored" only refers to the bestowal of blessings (*inᶜām*) but it does not express preferment (*tafaḍḍul*). That is why the verse then says *tafḍīl* to convey that meaning as well. Another suggested meaning is that *takrīm* pertains to

> worldly blessings, while *tafḍīl* pertains to otherworldly blessings. Another suggested view is that *takrīm* refers to the bestowal of blessings that could be set as a basis for [religious and devotional] responsibility, while *tafḍīl* refers to the actual imposed injunctions that make them rise to lofty stations.

The point that there is an additional element in *tafḍīl* than *takrīm*—which is the bestowal being beyond what one deserves—is not true, because while tafḍīl is applicable to cases where the preferred individual has no desert it is also applicable to situations where the recipient deserves the conferment. As with the other views that he has narrated from the exegetes, they are mere claims without any proof.

Rāzī has discussed the difference between *takrīm* and *tafḍīl* in his *Tafsīr* as follows:

> The most plausible view is to maintain that He preferred mankind over the rest of the animals by the natural and intrinsic creation of the human being such as the intellect, speech, writing, beautiful form and upright posture. Then He enabled mankind to acquire true beliefs and moral virtues by means of intellection and understanding. The first one is *takrīm* and the second one is *tafḍīl*. Therefore, it is as if the verse is saying: We have preferred them by enabling them to acquire what would cause their salvation and proximity [to God] through the means with which We have honored them. Hence, it is incumbent on them to be grateful and use what has been created for them in what they have been created for, meaning that they should serve God alone, not associate anyone with Him, and forsake their current practice of worshipping others.

What he is essentially saying is that *takrīm* refers to intrinsic matters and what pertains to them such as instincts, while *tafḍīl* refers to acquired perfections. It is true that the divine favors and existential perfections of mankind include both intrinsic matters and acquired perfections—as he has said—but the reader would certainly admit that matching *takrīm* with the former and *tafḍīl* with the latter does not comply with their lexical meaning or their common usage. Hence, the difference between the two terms is as we stated above [that is, absolute vs. relative].

The second point is that the verse is about human perfection in terms of their natural existence and their honor and preferment compared to the other natural beings that are found in the physical world. Hence the

angels are not a subject of discussion in this verse as they do not belong to the physical world. Therefore, what is meant by mankind's preferment over many of the creatures is their preferment over creatures "other than the angels"—that is, all beings in the physical world. The verse is silent about the angels [and mankind's relative superiority or inferiority to them] because they belong to a different realm of existence.

This should clarify the flaw with what some exegetes have argued based on this verse, that the angels are superior to mankind—including the prophets. Some have said that "We preferred them greatly over many of those whom We have created" indicates that there is some creature over whom mankind have not been preferred, and that can only be angels because everyone concurs that the children of Adam are preferred to all animals.

The flaw with this view is that the subject of the verse is preferment in the context of natural and material existence, and the angels are non-existent in this context. Some have answered the above claim by saying that preferment in this verse does not pertain to spiritual reward and merit (*thawāb*). Being preferred by acquired reward is not applicable here because the verse is talking about initial and unprecedented preferment [that is, preferment not preceded by desert and action]. The verse is about God's preferment of mankind by various blessings that they have been given in this world. This answer essentially reduces to ours.

Some have said that "many" (*kathīr*) in this verse means "all" (*jamīʿ*), and the particle *min* (lit. "of") is to elucidate what this "all" is (called *min bayāniyyah*). Hence, the implied meaning is: We have preferred them over those whom We have created, which are many. This is an implausible interpretation, they have not provided any evidence for it, and it does not match the context of the verse.

Another suggested view is that this verse is like when one says, "I spent my credible reputation for him" or "I let him on the vastness of my property," which do not mean that the person has some reputation that is credible and some that is not, or that the person let him on the vast portion of his property but not on the narrow side! Instead, what is meant is that "I spent my reputation—which is very credible—for him" and "I let him on my property which is vast." This interpretation, however, is not applicable to the current verse. In these two examples, reputation and property are not split into two divisions; rather, the person's reputation is entirely credible and his property is a vast whole. This is not the same as

what is being claimed about the verse: That the verse is saying "some" (that is, "many") but it means "all."[1] Another possible interpretation based on the above examples is that "I spent my most credible reputation for him, let alone my less credible reputation," and "I permitted him to enter my vast property, let alone entering my smaller property." However, there is no doubt that this interpretation is also not applicable to this verse, because it would imply that if something holds for a part of a group then it should necessarily hold for the whole [which is clearly not true].

Some have answered the above problem as follows: If "many" does not include the angels and the particle *min* (lit. "of") is a discriminatory one (*tabʿīḍiyyah*), then all that can be said is that the verse is silent about the relative preferment of mankind over the angels. This does not necessarily mean that the angels are superior to mankind, because it could be that the two are equal. Even if we say that the verse implies that the angels are superior to mankind, then that only means that angels as a genus are superior to mankind as a genus, which does not contradict having individual human beings—like the prophets—who are superior to the angels.

However, the correct view is what we presented to you above, that the verse does not concern preferment in the sense of reward and otherworldly excellence to begin with. Instead, it concerns preferment in terms of physical existence. Therefore, "many of those whom We have created" does not include the angels. Moreover, the particle *min* is a discriminatory one, which means that We have preferred mankind over many out of all, where all includes angels and others—like human beings, animals and the jinn. [All that this verse is saying is that] the human being is superior to the animals and the jinn with regards to his physical existence. As with mankind's superiority over angels, we shall discuss it below by the will of God.

Discussion on the Superiority of Mankind vs. Angels

Muslims disagree about who is superior: the human being or the angel? The most popular view is that of the Ashʿarites who say that the human being is superior. What they mean is the superiority of believers among mankind, otherwise no one has doubted that some human beings are more astray than cattle, and those would be the deniers of truth among

1 In other words, this verse explicitly splits God's creatures into two groups, as opposed to the above examples that assert a trait and quality for the subject without dividing it. (Trans.)

mankind, so how could they ever be higher than the intimate angels? The Ashʿarites have drawn on this verse to prove their point, based on the view that "many" means "all" as we discussed in the exposition of the verse. They have also drawn on narrations that say that a believer is more honorable to God than the angels.

This view is also widely held by Shias. They have argued for it by saying that the angels are innately obedient and incapable of disobedience, while the human being is equally capable of obedience and disobedience because of free will. Mankind are composed of both godly and satanic drives and are a mix of intellect, appetite and anger. A believer is superior to an angel because he obeys God while he is not barred from disobedience, unlike an angel.

Despite the above, the view that mankind are superior to angels as stated above is not a matter of consensus among the Ashʿarites, because some of them believe that the angels are absolutely superior, as held by al-Zajjāj and also attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās.

Some of them have said that human messengers have absolute superiority over everyone; then angel messengers are superior to the rest of the human beings and angels; and then the rest of the angels have superiority over the rest of mankind.

Some others have said that the Cherub angels (*al-karrūbiyyūn*) are absolutely superior to all, then there are human messengers, then perfect men, and then there are the rest of the angels who are superior to the rest of mankind. This is Imam al-Rāzī's view and he has attributed it to al-Ghazzālī.

The Muʿtazilites have argued that the angels are superior to mankind based on the apparent meaning of *And surely We have honored the children of Adam… and We preferred them greatly over many of those whom We have created* (17:70). Their argument was discussed above in our exposition of the verse.

Al-Zamakhsharī has severely criticized those who say that mankind are superior to the angels by interpreting "many" as "all." In *al-Kashshāf* he says:

> *"Many of those whom We have created"* are creatures other than the angels. It is enough honor and excellence for mankind to be next to the angels in rank—given the status and position of the angels with God.
>
> It is a surprise how the determinists (*mujabbirah*) have inverted

everything and insisted on it, to the point that their custom of obstinacy has dared them hold such a great claim that mankind are superior to angels. This is while they have heard about where God has positioned the angels, how He has glorified their status, how He has frequently mentioned them with such high regard, how close they are [to God], and how He has described their relation to the prophets as the relation of the prophets to their people. Their extreme narrow-mindedness has led them to forge certain accounts and hadiths to prove their view. One of them is that the angels told God, "Our Lord! You have given the world (*al-dunyā*) to mankind, where they eat and enjoy, but You have not given these things to us, so give them to us in the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*)." God replied, "By My Might and Majesty, I would never set the descendants of him whom I have created by My hands equal to those to whom I said, 'Be' and they were." They have also narrated from Abū Hurayrah that he said, "A believer is more honorable to God than the angels that are with Him."

What is more, they have interpreted "many" in this verse as "all." Indeed God has left them to themselves such that they have lost right judgment, for they do not realize the absurdity of the statement, "And We have preferred them over all out of whom[1] We have created." The phrase "all among whom" (*jamīᶜin min-man*) is a bigger bone in their throat and a sharper thorn in their eye [than what they are trying to escape and deny], however they do not realize this.

See how they have devised and resorted to far-fetched explanations and possibilities in enmity toward the Higher Council [that is, the angels]. It is as if they hold a grudge against Gabriel for destroying the cities of Lot's people, and that enmity does not ever leave their heart.

The narration that he has referred to—about the angels requesting God to give them the hereafter just as He gave this world to the children of Adam—has been narrated on the authority of Ibn ᶜUmar, Anas b. Mālik, Zayd b. Aslam and Jābir b. ᶜAbd-Allāh al-Anṣārī, from the Prophet. In Jābir's narration the Prophet said: When God created Adam and his

1 This is senseless because the discriminatory "of" (*min tabᶜīḍiyyah*) in the verse does not comply with "all." (Trans.)

descendants, the angels said, "O Lord! You have created them and they eat, drink, mate and ride horses. So let this world be for them and the hereafter be for us." God replied, "I would never set those whom I have created by My hands equal to those to whom I said, 'Be' and they were."

There are problems with this narration in terms of content. Eating, drinking, mating and other similar acts by human beings are to maintain their material existence according to the physical faculties that God has equipped them with. Human beings derive pleasure from these activities only because these things ensure their subsistence as individuals or as a species. But the angels already have the perfection that human beings seek through these physical faculties and tedious and burdensome acts. The angels are clear from subjection to the physical system that governs the material world. Hence, it is impossible that they would make the above request, because they do not suffer any deprivation to begin with so that they may desire, hope and yearn to have such a gain.

A similar problem applies to the above argument [by the Ashʿarites] that mankind are superior to the angels because they are composed of faculties that pull him to obedience as well as faculties that pull him to disobedience. According to this view, if they choose obedience over disobedience and settle for submission and servitude, then their obedience is superior to that of the angels because the angels are intrinsically created obedient and their nature is fashioned in a way that is averse to sin. Therefore, obedient human beings are closer [to God], have a higher rank, and deserve a greater reward and remuneration.

This is based on a rational [that is, common sense] principle that is valid in human societies. According to this principle, obedience—meaning compliance with authoritative commands and prohibitions—is superior and preferred to disobedience, and it makes one worthy of reward and remuneration. This holds for cases when the person who is charged with an authoritative command is in a position where he can act or refrain, and both are equally possible for him. Similarly, if the person's position is closer and more leaning to disobedience, then his obedience will be a greater virtue and more fruitful, and vice versa. For instance, in obeying the command against adultery, impotent individuals, old men, and those who cannot easily find the means to commit adultery are not equal to a young and healthy man who finds almost no impediments in front of him, or one who is not held back by any barrier except for the fear of God. Some of these abstentions do not even count as obedience, while

some count as obedience and some others would be the highest degrees of obedience. Likewise is the case of other acts.

Given that angels have no access to sin for their lack of appetite, anger and selfish desires, their conformance to authoritative commands is like the conformance of the impotent and the old to the prohibition of adultery. This is what gives superiority to mankind over the angels.

The problem with this view is that if it were so, then the obedience of angels would not be any virtue to begin with, because they do not have the option to disobey. They are not equally disposed to obedience and disobedience. In that case the angels would not have any essential merit or value in and of themselves, because according to this view there is no merit except for obedience when disobedience is also possible. In fact, we cannot even refer to the angels as "obedient" except metaphorically, because their very essence necessitates obedience. If that were the case, then there would be no grounds for their proximity to their Lord and their acts would be devoid of any value.

This is while God has assigned them a position of nearness and proximity; He has settled them in Sacred Heavens and Stations of Intimacy; and He has appointed them to be keepers of His secrets, carriers of His commands and intermediaries between Him and His creatures. Is all this based on an arbitrary decision by Him without any qualification or worth on the part of the angels?

Indeed God has praised them with the loftiest of praises where He says: Nay! they are honored servants. *They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act* (21:26-27), and: *They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded* (66:6). He has described them as being honored [in verse 21:26] unconditioned by any condition, and has praised them for their obedience and their refusal to disobey [in verse 66:6].

He has also praised their worship and subservience to their Lord where He says: And for fear of Him they tremble (21:28); But if they are proud, yet those with your Lord glorify Him during the night and the day, and they are not tired (41:38); Surely those who are with your Lord are not too proud to serve Him, and they declare His glory and throw themselves down in humility before Him (7:206). Thus, He orders His Prophet to remember and worship Him as they [the angels] do.

The fact is that having the option to either act or refrain is not a criterion of merit and virtue in obedience. This option is only indicative of

moral value inasmuch as it reveals the good will and pure intention of the person.

The evidence for this is that the obedience of one who has an impure spirit and an evil character is of no worth no matter how much effort he puts into purifying and perfecting his action. For example consider the acts of obedience by a hypocrite or one in whose heart is disease: Their acts are void to God and their good deeds are effaced from their book of deeds. Therefore, what gives virtue, excellence and value to the obedience of an actor is the purity of his soul, the fairness of his substance, and the sincerity in his servitude—which then manifest in refraining to disobey, choosing obey, and bearing its hardship.

Given the above criterion, we should add that the essence of the angels is rooted in purity and nobility, and their actions are solely governed by humility in servitude and sincerity of intention. In these aspects they surpass the essence of mankind which is tainted by desires and mixed with anger and lust. Similarly, the actions of mankind are rarely immune from hidden traces of polytheism, egoistic dispositions and carnal inclinations.

Therefore, the makeup of angels is superior to the makeup of human beings, and the acts of the angels—which are purely for the sake of God—are better than the acts of mankind, for actions are colored by the makeup and essence of the actor. The perfection that the human being seeks through his obedience is a reward that angels are already given as soon as they are created, as discussed above.

Nevertheless, since man achieves his essential perfection gradually by a slow or rapid process of actualizing his essential potentialities, it is possible that he may attain a higher level of proximity and perfection than what the angels have attained by the virtue of their essence, because the potentials of mankind allow for this. The apparent verses of God's Book confirm this possibility.

This excellence of the human being is seen where He relates the story of making him a vicegerent in the earth. There He describes humankind as a being that is capable of having knowledge of all of the names, which is something that the angels miss. This is a level of perfection for humankind that angels cannot achieve by celebrating God's praise and extolling His holiness. It is a level of perfection that exonerates the human being from the corruption and bloodshed that will appear from him on earth. He says: *And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a khalif, they said: What! will You place in it such as shall make mischief*

in it and shed blood, and we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness? He said: Surely I know what you do not know… (2:30). We discussed this topic in detail under these verses [2:30] in the first volume of this book.

He further narrates His order to the angels to prostrate to Adam and their unanimous prostration as a result: *So the angels made obeisance, all of them together* (15:30). As we clarified in the story of prostration in Chapter 7, their prostration was essentially a sign of their humility before the station of human perfection. In that story, Adam is set as a *qiblah* (direction) for them and he is a symbol that represents humanity before the angels. This is what God's Book apparently suggests, and it is also supported by the narrations. There is also a rational aspect to this discussion that is to be found in its own place.

❧

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُناسٍ بِإِمامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولٰئِكَ يَقْرَؤُنَ كِتابَهُمْ وَ لا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلاً ﴿٧١﴾

(17:71) ***(Remember) the day when We will call every people by their Imam; then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly.***

"The day" is the Day of Resurrection, and it involves an omitted verb: *"Remember the day when…"* Imam is a leader; one who is followed. God has used this title to describe certain groups of mankind who guide the people by God's command. For example: He said: *Surely I will make you an Imam of men* (2:124), and: *And We made them Imams who guided (people) of our command* (21:73). This title is also used for another group who is followed in the way of error and misguidance, as He says: *Then fight the leaders* (a'immah, plural of imām) *of unbelief* (9:12). In addition, He has called the Torah as an Imam: *And before it* [the Qur'an] *(is) the Book of Moses, a leader* (imām) *and a mercy* (11:17). Perhaps one can infer that all divine books that comprise of a divine code (shariah) are Imams, including the books of Noah, Abraham, Jesus and Muḥammad.

The title has also been applied to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), which is the apparent sense of Imam in the verse: *We have*

recorded everything in a clear writing (Imamin mubīn) (36:12). The current verse clearly implies that every group of people will have an Imam of its own that is different from the Imam of the other groups, because the word "Imam" has been added to the pronoun "their" which refers to "every people." Hence, Imam here cannot mean the Guarded Tablet, for there is only one of that and it does not belong to any group of people exclusively.

Moreover, what this verse is saying apparently applies to all of the people from the beginning to the end. Under the verse, *"(All) People were a single nation; so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book"* (2:213), we said that the first divine scripture that consisted of a divine law was Noah's Book, and there was no such book before him. This shows that Imam in this verse cannot mean book (that is, scripture) because the verse asserts that every people will have an Imam while the nations before Noah did not have a scripture.

Ruling out the above possibilities, it becomes evident the Imam of every people means the person whom they follow in the path of either truth or falsehood. As we said above, the Qur'an calls both of such leaders "Imams." Another possibility is that Imam only refers to a true leader, which is one individual in every era whom God chooses to guide the people of his time. Sometimes this Imam is a prophet, as was the case with Abraham and Muḥammad, and sometimes he is not. This was discussed in detail in the exposition of the verse: *And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you an Imam of men. Ibrahim said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He* (2:124).

However, this last possibility is unlikely because one of the leaders of misguidance was Pharaoh about whom God says: *He shall lead his people on the resurrection day, and bring them down to the fire* (11:98). And He says: *That Allah might separate the impure from the good, and put the impure, some of it upon the other, and pile it up together, then cast it into hell* (8:37). What is inferred from these and other similar verses—which are many—is that the misguided folk will not separate from their leaders on the Day of Resurrection. An implication of this is that they will be called and summoned with their [evil] leaders.

Furthermore, "their Imam" is mentioned in an absolute form. It is not conditioned by the Imam being a true and rightful one that has been assigned by God to guide the people by His command, and the leaders of misguidance have been called Imams just like the leaders of guidance. The

subsequent part of the verse and the following verse also suggest that what is meant by the Imam by whom people are called is a person that people took to as their leader in their lives and the role model that they followed in this world, as opposed to someone that God chose for leadership and assigned to guide by His command, irrespective of the people following him or forsaking him.

Therefore, apparently what is meant by the leader of every people is whoever they followed, whether he was a true leader or a false one. It is not as some have thought that the people will be called by the names of their leaders such as, "O nation of Abraham," "O nation of Muḥammad," "O people of Pharaoh," and so on. This does not comply with what follows next as a consequence of this: *Then whoever is given his book in his right hand… And whoever is blind in this* (17:71-72). There is no connection between calling people by the names of their leaders—as suggested in this interpretation—and giving them their books in their right hands or being blind.

Rather, based on what follows, what is meant by "calling" is to be gathered and summoned. That is, they will be gathered with their leaders, then those who subscribed to a true leader will be given their books in their right hands, and the blindness of those who failed to see, recognize and follow their true Imam in this world will manifest. This is what can be inferred by contemplating the verse.

The exegetes have interpreted Imam in this verse in a variety of different ways. Some of them are as follows:

It has been said: Imam here means the scriptures that people subscribed to such as the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an. On the Day of Resurrection it will be announced, "O people of the Torah," "O people of the Gospel" and "O people of the Qu'ran." This view and the problem with it were discussed above.

It has been said: For those who were on the right path, their Imam will be their prophet; and for those who pursued falsehood, their Imam will be Satan and the leaders of misguidance. It will be said, "Bring the followers of Abraham," "Bring the followers of Moses" and "Bring the followers of Muḥammad," whereby their followers—that is, the followers of truth—will rise and will be given their books in their right hands. Then it will be said, "Bring the followers of Satan" and "Bring the followers of chiefs of misguidance." The problem with this view is that it interprets Imam in the verse according to its lexical definition, which is an intelligible leader that is followed. However, there is no reason to adopt this definition when the

term has its own definition in the language of the Qur'an, which includes those who guide by God's command as well as those who are followed in the path of error and misguidance.

It has been said: Imam means their records of deeds. It will be said, "O people with books of good deeds" and "O people with books of evil deeds." The books of deeds are called Imam (lit. "leader") because people follow their rule about whether the person must go to Paradise or Hell.

The problem with this view is that there is no justification for calling the book of deeds an Imam. Rather, one's book of deeds follows his actions in terms of being good or evil. Therefore, it is more appropriate to be called a follower (*tābiʿ*) than a leader (*matbūʿ*). Furthermore, what the people follow is God's judgment after the opening of the books, questioning, weighing, and witnessing. As with the records of deeds, they only include a report of good and evil deeds but not the final judgment.

This also shows that Imam here means neither the Guarded Tablet, nor the record of deeds of every nation as a whole—which has been referred to in the verse: *Every nation shall be called to its book* (45:28). This is because such a meaning does not comply with the subsequent part of the verse, which is apparently about individuals and not nations as a whole: *then whoever is given his book in his right hand* (17:71).

It has been said: Imam is the plural of *umm* (mother), so people will be called by the names of their mothers. It will be said, "O son of *fulānah* [feminine so-and-so]" instead of "O son of *fulān* [masculine so-and-so]." They have also reported a narration to this effect.

The problem with this view is that it does not match the wording of the verse, because the verse says, "We will call every people by their Imam." The suggested interpretation above corresponds to "We will call people by their mothers" or "We will call every person by his mother (*ummihi*)."[1] As with what they have narrated, even if it is authenticated it would be an independent narration, not a narration pertaining to the interpretation of this verse in particular. This is not to mention that using imām as the plural of *umm* is very rare and uncommon, and one cannot interpret God's Book according to such definitions. Al-Kashshāf has referred to this view as an innovation (*bidʿah*) in interpretation.

It has been said: Imam means any intelligible or unintelligible being

1 In other words, if Imam were the plural of *umm*, then the verse would be saying: We will call every group of people by their mothers, which does not make sense as it suffers from singular-plural mismatch. (Trans.)

that is followed and subscribed to, including true leaders like prophets and saint, as wells as false ones like Satan and chiefs of misguidance; true religions and false ones; divine scriptures and misleading books; righteous traditions and unrighteous ones. Perhaps calling people in this fashion alludes to the idea that on the Day of Resurrection every follower will accompany his leader. The letter *bāʾ* in *bi-imāmihim* (lit. "by their Imam") conveys accompaniment (*muṣāḥabah*).

This view suffers from the problem that we mentioned about the second view—that Imam means the prophets for some and the leaders of misguidance for others. Such lexical interpretations are plausible when the word is not a Qur'anic term with its own usage and meaning in Qur'an's language. This is while Imam in the Qu'ran refers to one who guides by God's command or one who is a leader of misguidance. It is also possible that the letter *bāʾ* is an instrumental particle.[1]

Furthermore, it should be noted that the guidance of scriptures, traditions, religions and so on reduces to the guidance of leaders (sing. *al-imām*). The same is true about the prophets, for they guide by the virtue of being Imams; otherwise, in the sense that they inform the people about hidden realities or propagate their message, they are not Imams but they are prophets or messengers. Likewise is the misguidance of false religions, misleading books and innovated traditions, for their misguidance really belongs to their founders and innovators.

…then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit* (fatīlan) *unjustly: *Fatīl* means the narrow thread that is in the small split on date stones. It has also been said that *fatīl* is the thread that is inside a date stone, *naqīr* is the thread that is outside, and *qiṭmīr* is the split on the stone.[2]

The word "then…" shows that what is said here is a consequence of being called by their Imam. That is, their followership of their Imams will cause them to be divided and separated into two groups: those whom will be given their books in their right hands, and those who will be blind and more erring from the way. This shows that there are two types of Imams: the leaders of guidance and the leaders of misguidance. The subsequent

1 The meaning would be: We will call every people by the means of their Imam. (Trans.)

2 *Fatīl* is used in 4:49, 4:77, 17:71; *naqīr* is used in 4:53 and 4:124; *qiṭmīr* is used in verse 35:13. (Trans.)

part of these verses [that is, the second half of verse 17:71 and verse 17:72] is a consequence of the first part of the verse [17:71], and this shows that Imam here includes both leaders of guidance and leaders of misguidance. This confirms what we said above. This can also be inferred from the fact that instead of talking about those whom are given their books in their left hands or from their backs—as mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an[1]—the first group is contrasted by "*whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter*" (17:72).[2]

Given the context of these verses, the implied meaning is: They will be divided into two groups. One group is given their records of deeds in their right hands, and they shall read their books with delight, pleasure and happiness because they are felicitous. They shall not be wronged even as much as a date-thread, but they will be given their rewards fully and completely.

وَ مَنْ كانَ فِي هذِهِ أَعْمى فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمى وَ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً ﴿٧٢﴾

(17:72) ***And whoever is blind*** **(aʿmā)** ***in this, he shall (also) be blind*** **(aʿmā)** ***in the hereafter; and more erring from the way.***

The contradistinction between "this" and "hereafter" shows that "this" means "this world" (*al-dunyā*). Likewise, since the verse serves to match and correspond between the current life and the hereafter, "blindness in this world" and "blindness in the hereafter" both refer to lack of insight and inner perception (*baṣīrah*). God says: *For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts* (22:46). This is confirmed by the addition of "and more erring from the way" to blindness in the hereafter.

The implied meaning is: Those who do not recognize the true Imam and do not follow the true path in the life of this world will not find salvation and felicity in the life of hereafter and will not achieve forgiveness and mercy.

Our explanation should show the weakness of a view proposed by

1 See verses 69:25 and 84:10. (Trans.)

2 In other words, if the two groups were described by how they will receive their record of deeds, then Imam could be interpreted as the record of deeds, but the second group is described by blindness and error, which are more compatible with following misleading leaders. (Trans.)

some exegetes, that "in this" refers to the bounties and blessings mentioned above, so the meaning is: Whoever is blind with regard to the blessings that he has been granted—meaning that he does not recognize them as blessings and does not thank God for them—will be blind in the hereafter.

Likewise is another interpretation, that blindness in this world means lack of insight and perception, while blindness in the hereafter means lack of physical sight (*baṣar*). In addition to what we said above about this, it should be noted that lack of physical sight in the hereafter essentially reduces to lack of insight, because God says: *On the day when hidden things shall be made manifest* (86:9).

The words of one exegete seem to suggest that the second *aʿmā* [used for the hereafter] is a comparative, for he has interpreted it as more intense blindness and more misguided from the path. The context of the verse complies with this view.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 17:70, Zayd b. ʿAlī narrated from his father: *"And surely We have honored the children of Adam"* means: We have preferred the children of Adam over the rest of the creatures. *"And We carry them in the land and the sea"* means: on the wet and the dry. *"And We have provided them with good things"* means: of every good fruit. *"And We have made them to excel"* means: all animals and birds eat and drink [directly] by their mouth without raising their food or drink to their mouths by their hands, except for the son of Adam who raises his food to his mouth by his hand. This is one preferment.[1]

(2) Concerning verse 17:70 (*And We preferred them greatly over many of those whom We have created*) Imam al-Bāqir said: All creatures have been created bent except for the human being who has been created upright.[2]

Author's comment: These two narrations mention some examples and instances of preferment, as evidenced by the Imam's expression at the end of the first hadith: "This is one preferment."

(3) Al-Fuḍayl said: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about God's words:

1 Shaykh Ṭūsī's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Jābir.

(Remember) The day when We will call every people by their Imam (17:71). He said: "The Messenger of God will come with his people, ʿAlī will come with his people, al-Ḥasan with his people, al-Ḥusayn with his people—and anyone who has died during the time of any Imam will come with him."[1]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Aren't you grateful to God? For indeed when it is the Day of Resurrection, every people will be called to whom they subscribed to. There we will take resort to the Messenger of God and you will take resort to us.[2]

Author's comment: This has also been narrated from the Imam in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. This narration shows that the Messenger of God is the Imam of the Imams, just as he is a witness over all witnesses. It also shows that being called by one's Imam is a rule that also applies to the Imams themselves.

(5) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: Both Shias and Sunnis have narrated via authentic chains of transmission from ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, that he narrated from his fathers up to the Prophet: Every people will be called by the Imam of their time, the book of their Lord, and the tradition (Sunnah) of their prophet.

Author's comment: *Tafsīr al-burhān* has also narrated this on the authority of Ibn Shahr-Āshūb, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his fathers up to the Prophet with the same words, and has also ascribed it to both Shia and Sunni narrations.

(6) Concerning verse 17:71 (*The day when We will call every people by their Imam*) the Messenger of God said: Every people will be called by the Imam of their time, the book of their Lord, and the tradition (Sunnah) of their prophet.[3]

(7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "The earth will never be left without an Imam that legalizes what God has made lawful and illegalizes what God has made unlawful. This is what God says: *(Remember) the day when We will call every people by their Imam* (17:71)." The Imam then said, "The Messenger of God said: Whoever dies without having an Imam has died the death of the pre-Islamic

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Ibn Shahr-Āshūb.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, from ʿAlī.

era (*jāhiliyyah*)…"[1]

Author's comment: The reason why this verse is evidence to what the Imam is saying here is that the verse asserts the call of all people by their Imam without exception.

(8) Concerning verse 17:71 (*The day when We will call every people by their Imam*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: On the Day of Resurrection God will say, "Does the justice of your Lord not require that every people should follow whomever they subscribed to?" They [the people] will say, "Yes!" So He will say, "Separate from one another" and thus they will separate and classify.[2]

Author's comment: This narration confirms what we said above—that calling by an Imam means gathering and summoning them with him, not shouting his name. There are several narrations with the same meaning as the above narrations.

(9) Concerning *fatīlan* in verse 17:71—And they shall not be dealt with a whit (*fatīlan*) unjustly—one of the Infallibles said: It is the skin that covers a date stone.[3]

(10) Al-Muthannā narrates: Abū Baṣīr asked Imam al-Ṣādiq while I was listening: "[What do you say about] a man who had 100,000 and every year he said, 'This year I will go to the hajj! This year I will go to the hajj!' until death overtook him before he performed the obligatory pilgrimage." The Imam said: "O Abū Baṣīr, have you not heard God's words: *And whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter; and more erring from the way* (17:72)? It means being blind from performing any of the duties that God has made obligatory."[4]

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Ismāʿīl b. Hammām.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

4 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

Verses 73-81

After rebuking the polytheists for their denial of God's unity and the hereafter, and providing proofs against them, these verses discuss some of their plots and machinations against the Qur'an and the Prophet. They wanted to tempt the Prophet away from some of what has been revealed to him so that he may somehow compromise with them. They also wanted to expel him from Mecca.

God gives the most severe warnings to the Prophet lest he should incline toward them by the slightest bit, and threatens the polytheists by destruction should they expel the Prophet.

The verses also enjoin the Prophet to perform the prayers, to seek refuge with his Lord in his coming and going, and to proclaim the appearance of the truth.

Commentary

وَ إِنْ كادُوا لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ الَّذِی أَوْحَيْنا إِلَيْكَ لِتَفْتَرِیَ عَلَيْنا غَيْرَهُ وَ إِذاً لاتَّخَذُوكَ خَلِيلاً ﴿٧٣﴾

(17:73) ***And surely*** **(wa in)** ***they had purposed to turn you away*** **(la-yaftinūka, from fitnah)** ***from that which We have revealed to you, that you should forge against Us other than that, and then they would certainly have taken you for a friend*** **(khalīlan).**

The particle *in* is actually *inna* (surely, indeed) because of the letter *lām* at the beginning of *la-yaftinūka*. *Fitnah* means to make someone slip or turn someone away. *Khalīl* is derived from *al-khullah*,[1] meaning friendship. Some have said that it is derived *al-khallah*, meaning need, but this is an unlikely possibility.

The context of the verse suggests that *"that which We have revealed to you"* is the Qur'an in the sense that it comprises of monotheism, denying partners for God, and righteous instructions. This confirms some

1 It is also recorded as *khallah* and *khillah*. (Trans.)

narrations about the context of revelation of these verses, that the polytheists asked the Prophet to stop speaking evil of their gods, to drive away from himself their slaves who were believers, and to disassociate with the lower-class Muslims in the society so that they would sit with him and listen to him.

The implied meaning is: The polytheists were about to make you slip and turn away from what We have revealed to you so that you may take a contrary approach and course of action. In that case you would be forging against Us, by the means of your action, something that We have not revealed to you; then they would have certainly taken you for a friend.

وَ لَوْ لا أَنْ ثَبَّتْناكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتَ تَرْكَنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئاً قَلِيلاً ﴿٧٤﴾

(17:74) ***And had it not been that We had already established you, you would certainly have been near to incline*** **(tarkanu, from rukūn)** ***to them a little;***

Given the context of the verse, "establishment" (*tathbīt*) means God's protection and prevention. *Rukūn* means inclination, or, according to some, the slightest inclination. Instead of saying, "you would have inclined" the verse says, "you would have been near to incline," which shows that not only did he not incline, but he did not even come near to inclination. This is confirmed by speaking about "inclination to them" instead of "inclination to accepting their request."

The implied meaning is: Had it not been that We made you firm and established by Our protection, it was close that you might incline toward them a bit—but We established you, and thus you did not incline toward them even by the slightest amount, let alone accepting their request. This means the following: 1. The Prophet did not accept their request; 2. he did not incline to them even a little; and 3. he did not even come near inclining to them.

إِذاً لَأَذَقْناكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَياةِ وَ ضِعْفَ الْمَماتِ ثُمَّ لا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنا نَصِيراً ﴿٧٥﴾

(17:75) ***In that case We would certainly have made you to taste a double (punishment) in this life and a double (punishment) after death, then you would not have found any helper against Us.***

The context of the verse is that of threat. Therefore, "the double of life" and "the double of death" mean double punishment in this life and double punishment after death. The implied meaning is: Had you come near inclining to them a little, We would have certainly made you taste twice the punishment that We inflict upon the evildoers in this world and twice the punishment that We inflict upon them after death—that is, twice the punishment of this world and the hereafter.

Majmaʿ al-bayān has narrated from Abān b. Taghlib that "double" (*ḍiʿf*) means punishment—a punishment that is twice as painful [as regular punishment], and the verse means that, We would have punished you by both the punishment of this world and the punishment of the hereafter. In support of this meaning, they [the exegetes] have cited this poem:

In intense *ḍiʿf* I spend the night
Since Mālik was taken and killed in fight.

Where "intense *ḍiʿf*" means "intense punishment" or "intense pain."

The subsequent part of the verse emphasizes this threat: *Then you would not have found any helper against Us* (17:75). That is: When the above punishment occurs you will have no escape from it.

وَ إِنْ كادُوا لَيَسْتَفِزُّونَكَ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ لِيُخْرِجُوكَ مِنْها وَ إِذاً لا يَلْبَثُونَ خِلافَكَ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً ﴿٧٦﴾

(17:76) *And surely they purposed to unsettle you* (la-yastafizzūnaka, from istifzāz) *from the land* (al-arḍ) *that they might expel you from it, and in that case they will not tarry behind you* (khilāfaka) *but a little.*

Istifzāz means to drive and move something with lightness and ease. The definite article "the" in "the land" (*"al"* in *"al-arḍ"*) indicates a known land, which in this case is Mecca. *Khilāf* means afterwards. "Little" here means little time.

The implied meaning is: The polytheists were close to driving you out from the land of Mecca in order to expel you from it. If they had done so and you had left the land, then they would not have lived there after you except for a short while, because no doubt they would have perished soon after.

Some exegetes have said that those who wanted to drive him away were the Jews, who wanted to expel him from Medina. Others have suggested

that it refers to both polytheists and the Jews, because they all wanted to expel him from the land of the Arabs.

This is unlikely because this chapter is Meccan, and its verses are congruous in terms of context.[1] The Prophet's struggle with the Jews was in Medina after the migration.

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ أَرْسَلْنا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنا وَ لا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنا تَحْوِيلاً ﴿٧٧﴾

(17:77) ***(This is Our) course*** **(sunnata)** ***with regard to those of Our messengers whom We sent before you, and you shall not find a change*** **(taḥwīlan)** ***in Our course.***

Taḥwīl means to move something from one state to another. The word *sunnah* (course, custom, tradition) at the beginning of the verse involves an omitted part: "This is like the course of those whom We sent…" It is a continuation of "they will not tarry" in the last verse. That is: They will not tarry behind you but a little, just as it was Our custom with regard to those of Our messengers whom We sent before you.

This course or custom is that of destroying the polytheists who expel their messengers from their towns and drive them away from among themselves. This is God's *sunnah* which has been ascribed to His messengers because this custom has been established for their sake, as He says: *And you shall not find a change in Our course* (17:77). He also says: *And those who disbelieved said to their messengers: We will most certainly drive you forth from our land, or else you shall come back into our religion. So their Lord revealed to them: Most certainly We will destroy the unjust* (14:13).

The implied meaning is: In that case [of driving you away] We would have certainly destroyed them, following the course that We have established and run for Our messengers whom We sent before you, and you shall never find any alteration or replacement in Our course.

أَقِمِ الصَّلاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كانَ مَشْهُوداً ﴿٧٨﴾

(17:78) ***Keep up prayer from the declining*** **(li-dulūk)** ***of the sun***

1 The congruity of its verses shows that they were revealed together in the same period and setting, that is, Mecca. (Trans.)

till the darkness **(ghasaq)** ***of the night and the morning recitation; surely the morning recitation is witnessed.***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Dulūk* means decline. Al-Mubarrid says: *dulūk al-shams* refers to the period from when it starts descending [at noon] until it sets [at sunset]. Some have said that its root is *dalak* (rub, massage). Noon has been called *dulūk* because an observer would rub his eyes due to the direct and intense sunshine. Sunset has been called *dulūk* because an observer would rub his eyes to see better and find the sun…
>
> *Ghasaq al-layl* means the appearance of the night's darkness. When a wound opens and its inside becomes visible it is said: *ghasaqat al-qurḥah*.

Al-Mufradāt says, "*Ghasaq al-layl* means the intense darkness of night."

There is a difference of opinion among the exegetes about the meaning of the first part of this verse. Shia narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt have interpreted *duluk al-shams* as noon, and *ghasaq al-layl* as midnight. We shall address them below in the discussions of the narrations, by the will of God.

Based on this view, the verse would include the time span from when the sun starts to decline at noon until midnight. This period includes four of the daily obligatory prayers: Noon, Afternoon, Sunset and Evening. Then the Morning Prayer is also added where the verse says: and the morning recitation. Hence the verse covers all five daily prayers.

…and the morning recitation…: This adds to "prayer" in the first part of the verse, which implies: "and keep up the morning recitation." The morning recitation refers to the Morning Prayer in the sense that it includes recitation [of the Qur'an]. The narrations are unanimous about "the morning recitation" being the Morning Prayer.

Likewise, both Shia and Sunni narrations agree that "surely the morning recitation is witnessed" refers to the Morning Prayer being witnessed by both the angels of night and the angels of day. We shall cite some of these narrations soon by the will of God.

وَ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نافِلَةً لَكَ عَسى أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقاماً مَحْمُوداً﴿٧٩﴾

(17:79) ***And during a part of the night, pray tahajjud for it*** **(bihi)**

beyond what is incumbent on you* (nāfilatan laka)*; maybe your Lord will raise you to a praised station.

Tahajjud is derived from *hujūd*, which originally means sleep. According to more than one of the exegetes, *tahajjud* means waking and getting up after sleep. "It" in "for it" (*bihi*) refers to Qur'an in the previous verse. It could also refer to "part of the night." *Nāfilah* is derived from *nafl*, meaning extra. Perhaps it can be said that "of the night" (*min al-layl*) serves to urge and encourage, like saying, "Take advantage of the night" (*ʿalayka bil-layl*). The usage of letter *fāʾ* (lit. "so," "thus") in *fatahajjad bihi* is similar to its usage in the verse: *Thus Me alone should you fear* (fa-iyyāya farhabūni; 16:51).[1]

The implied meaning is: After sleeping, keep vigil a part of the night by the Qu'ran—that is, in prayer—and this is an extra prayer for you beyond the obligatory ones.

…maybe your Lord will raise you* (yabʿathaka, from al-baʿth) *to a position* (maqāman) *of great glory: *Maqām* could be an infinitive, meaning to raise. This would make *maqāman* an object (*mafʿūl*) for the verb "raise," where it is from a different root but has the same meaning. The meaning would be: Maybe your Lord will raise you a raising of great glory. *Maqām* could also be a locative object. Then *yabʿathaka* would either mean "raise" or it would involve a sense of bestowal or the like. The meaning would be: Maybe your Lord will raise you in a praised station; or maybe your Lord will raise you while giving you a praised station; or maybe your Lord will give you while He raises you to a praised station.

God has described the Prophet's position as that of great glory (*maḥmūd*) in an absolute form, not conditioned or qualified by anything. This shows that it is a position that everyone would praise, which would be the case only if everyone is pleased with it and benefits from it. It is for this reason that the exegetes have interpreted the praised station as the Prophet's status of greatest intercession (*al-shafāʿat al-kubrā*) on the Day of Resurrection, because he will be praised by all people for that station. Sunni and Shia narrations from the Prophet and the Imams confirm this interpretation.

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1 The similarity is that in both commands—to "pray *tahajjud*" and to "fear God"—the object has preceded the verb (for emphasis). Thus, letter *fāʾ* at the beginning of *fatahajjad* and *farhabūni* serves to connect the verb to its previous part and show this change of order (Trans.)

وَ قُلْ رَبِّ أَدْخِلْنِي مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَ أَخْرِجْنِي مُخْرَجَ صِدْقٍ وَ اجْعَلْ لِي
مِنْ لَدُنْكَ سُلْطاناً نَصِيراً ﴿٨٠﴾

(17:80) ***And say: My Lord! make me to enter an ingoing* (mudkhal) *of truth, and cause me to go forth an outgoing* (mukhraj) *of truth, and grant me from near Thee power to assist (me).***

Mudkhal is an infinitive, which means ingoing or entering. Similarly, *mukhraj* means outgoing or exiting. They are specifically described as ingoing and outgoing "of truth," which means that each of them is a genuine act that is conducted according to the truth, without its outward being different from its inward, and without its parts contradicting one another. For example, one may call the people toward God by his tongue, but deep in his heart he wants to have authority over the people; or perhaps some aspects of his call may be sincerely for God while he has other objectives in some other aspects.

In short, it means that truth must be seen in all of his coming and going. His entire being must be covered by truth: He should say what he does and should do what he says, and what he says or does should be according to what he believes and sees. This is the station of the most truthful (*al-ṣiddīqīn*). It boils down to a prayer similar to this: "O God, take charge of my affairs as you take charge of the affairs of the most truthful."

…and grant me from near Thee power to assist (me): That is: Grant me power and dominance by assisting me in what I care and intend to do and the tasks that I engage in, such that I am not defeated in my call (*daʿwah*) by a false argument, I am not caught up by any trouble, scheme or plot by Your enemies, and I am not misled by any whisper or incitement from Satan.

As you can see the verse has an absolute sense. It commands the Prophet to ask his Lord to conduct his affairs in every coming and going according to the truth, and to grant him an authority from Himself by which He assists him, so that he does not deviate from any truth and does not manifest any falsehood. Therefore there is no evidence for this view of some exegetes: Entering refers to entering Medina by migration, and exiting refers to exiting Medina for the conquest of Mecca. The same holds for another interpretation: Entering means entering the grave by death, and exiting means exiting the grave upon resurrection.

Of course, since this verse comes after verses 17:73 (*And surely they had purposed to turn you away*) and 17:76 (*And surely they purposed to unsettle you*) and follows the same thread, it can be implied that the verse is commanding him to resort to his Lord in every matter that concerns him or in anything that he engages in as a part of his call, including entering or exiting anywhere that he settles, comes, or goes. This is clear.

وَ قُلْ جاءَ الْحَقُّ وَ زَهَقَ الْباطِلُ إِنَّ الْباطِلَ كانَ زَهُوقاً ﴿٨١﴾

(17:81) *And say: The truth has come and the falsehood has vanished* (zahaqa, from zuhūq)*; surely falsehood is a vanishing (thing).*

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Zuhūq* means destruction and annulment. *Zahaqat nafsuhu* is said when one's soul exits [his body], as if it leaves toward death and destruction.

The meaning of the verse is clear.

The verse commands the Prophet to proclaim the appearance of truth. Given the context of this set of verses that began with verse 17:73 (*And surely they had purposed to turn you away*), this verse is commanding the Prophet to notify the polytheists to despair of him; they are to be confident that there is no way for them to influence the Prophet.

It is deduced from this verse that falsehood has no endurement, as He says elsewhere: *And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability* (14:26).

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning the context of revelation of verse 17:73 (*And surely they had purposed to turn you away from that which We have revealed to you*) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: They [the polytheists] said to the Prophet, "Stop blaspheming our gods and disparaging our wits, and drive away these servants and abject people with their odoriferous smell so that we may sit with you and listen to what you say." This tempted the Prophet in their embracement of Islam, but then this verse was revealed.

Author's comment: A similar account has been narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Jubayr b. Nufayr.

(2) Umayyah b. Khalaf, Abū Jahl b. Hishām and some men of Quraysh went to Messenger of God and said, "Come and touch our gods, then we will join your religion." The Messenger of God felt sympathetic to them, as being separated from his people was difficult for him and he was eager that they embrace Islam. But God revealed: *And surely they had purposed to turn you away … any helper against Us* (17:73-75).[1]

Author's comment: This account does not match the verses because the verses negate the Prophet's coming near inclination toward them, let alone actually inclining. The same applies to the following two accounts:

(3) The tribe Thaqīf told the Prophet, "Give us one year so that our gods may receive offerings. When we receive and take possession of what is given to our gods in offering, we will convert to Islam and break these gods." The Prophet was about to give them respite but then it was revealed: *And surely they had purposed to turn you away* (17:73).[2]

(4) It is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq: When Mecca was conquered, the Messenger of God threw out the idols that were in the mosque [that is, the Sacred Mosque]. Among them was an idol on al-Marwa [Mount]. Quraysh requested him to leave this idol there. The Prophet was a very shy and soft individual [so he hesitated a bit], but then he ordered the idol to be broken. That is when this verse was revealed.[3]

Author's comment: There are other narrations similar to the above. These narrations do not comply with the Qur'an; the Messenger of God's status is far from settling for such innovations; and God has denied even coming close to the slightest inclination and disposition to such acts, let alone being about to do them.

Furthermore, the above accounts pertain to post-migration events, but this chapter was revealed in Mecca.

(5) Among al-Maʾmūn's questions of Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā, "Tell me about God's words: *Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave?* (9:43)." Al-Riḍā said, "This is an example of something

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

2 Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Abū Yaʿqūb.

that was revealed according to ‘ Beat one to frighten another.’[1] God has addressed His Prophet here but He has intended his nation. The same is true about: *Surely if you associate (with Allah), your work would certainly come to naught and you would certainly be of the losers* (39:65), and: *And had it not been that We had already established you, you would certainly have been near to incline to them a little* (17:74).” Al-Maʾmūn said, “You are right, O son of God’s Messenger.”[2]

(6) Concerning verse 17:75 (*In that case We would certainly have made you to taste…*) it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās: When this verse was revealed, the Prophet supplicated, “O God, do not ever leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye.”[3]

(7) Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab said: I asked ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, “When was the prayer prescribed for the Muslims as they perform it today?” He said, “In Medina after Islam gained power and strength. That is when God made jihad obligatory on the Muslims and the Messenger of God added seven units to the daily prayers: two to the Noon Prayer, two to the Afternoon Prayer, one to the Sunset Prayer and two to the Evening Prayer. But he left the Morning Prayer as it had been prescribed in Mecca. This was because the angels of the day rush to descend to the earth and the angels of night rush to ascend to the heaven at that time. This way [with only two units] both the angels of day and the angels of night would attend the Morning Prayer with the Messenger of God . That is why God says: *And the morning recitation; surely the morning recitation is witnessed* (17:78). It is witnessed by the Muslims and it is witnessed by the angels of both night and day.”[4]

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1 This is an Arabic expression, *iyyāki aʿnī wa ismaʿī yā jārah*, which is used when a speech is directed at someone but another person is intended as its real audience. Its origin is a quatrain that Sahl b. Mālik al-Fazārī composed when he wanted to send a message of love for a beautiful lady whom he could not address directly, although the literal meaning of the line per se is not related to its common usage. See Ṭurayḥī, *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn*, under *j-w-r*, and Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Imam Shināsī* (Mashhad: ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1428/2007), 10:217-218.

2 *Al-ʿUyūn*, with its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayan*.

4 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

(8) Concerning verse 17:78 (*Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night and the morning recitation*) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says, "The verse describes the imposition of the five obligatory prayers and their times." This is confirmed by what al-ʿAyyāshī has narrated about this verse from Imam al-Ṣādiq: "Indeed God has prescribed four obligatory prayers starting from when the sun starts to decline [that is, noon] until midnight. Two of them are for the period from the declining of the sun until its setting, with the difference that one precedes the other. And two of them are for the period from sunset until midnight, with the difference that one precedes the other."[1]

(9) The Messenger of God said: Gabriel came to me upon the *dulūk* of the sun—that is, when it starts declining—and performed the Noon Prayer with me.[2]

(10) The Messenger of God recited: *Surely the morning recitation is witnessed* (17:78) and said: God witnesses it as well as the angels of night and the angels of day.[3]

Author's comment: The Sunni and Shia narrations that interpret "the morning recitation being witnessed" as the witness of the angels of night and the angels of day almost reach the degree of *tawātur* (mass-transmission).[4] Some narrations also add God's witness, like the last narration, and some of them add the Muslims' witness, as seen above.

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked, "Will a believer get to intercede [on the Day of Resurrection]?" He said, "Yes." Then someone else asked, "Does a believer need Muḥammad's intercession?" He said, "Yes.

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, via his chain of narration, on the authority of ʿUbaydah b. Zurārah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ.

4 A *mutawātir* (repeatedly reported, mass-transmitted) hadith is one that has been narrated through so many chains that leave no doubt as to its authenticity of narration. In other words, the frequency of its narration is such that it is impossible for all of its transmitters to have forged, lied or made a mistake about it. (Trans.)

The believers have some sins and mistakes, and there is no one on that day who will be needless of Muḥammad's intercession." Someone asked him about the Messenger of God's words, "I am the chief of Adam's children—and there is no boasting in that." He said, "That is true. He will grab on one of the rings of the gate of Paradise and will open it. Then he will fall in prostration. So God will say, 'Raise your head! Intercede and your intercession shall be accepted. Ask and you shall be granted.' Then he will fall in prostration again. God will say, 'Raise your head! Intercede, and your intercession shall be accepted! Ask, and your request shall be granted!' Then he will raise his head; he will intercede and his intercession will be accepted, and he will ask and his request will be granted."[1]

(12) Concerning verse 17:79 (*Maybe your Lord will raise you to a praised station*) Imam al-Kāẓim said: On the Day of Resurrection people will rise for forty years[2]. The sun will be ordered to descend right over the heads of the people. They will be bridled by sweat, and the earth will be ordered not to absorb any of their sweat. People will resort to Adam to intercede for them, but he will refer them to Noah. Noah will refer them to Abraham; Abraham will refer them to Moses; Moses will refer them to Jesus. Jesus will refer them to Muḥammad: "Go to Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets." Muḥammad will tell them, "I am for it!" So he will set out for the gate of Paradise and will knock. He will be asked, "Who is it [at the door]?" while God knows best. Muḥammad will answer, "Open the door!" When the gate opens he meets his Lord and thus prostrates himself. He does not raise his head [from prostration] until he is told, "Speak! Ask and you shall be granted! Intercede and your intercession shall be accepted." He will raise his head, meet his Lord and thus prostrate himself again. The same will be said to him. So he will raise his head [and start interceding], to the point that he will intercede even for those

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of ʿUbaydah b. Zurārah.

2 The text metions that upon Resurrection people will rise for forty days. However, according to the intended hadith the correct period is forty years. Some exegetes even mention forty thousand years. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1419), 8:344. (Trans.)

who have been burnt by the Fire. On the Day of Resurrection there will no one among all nations more honorable [to God] than Muḥammad. This is what God says: *Maybe your Lord will raise you to a praised station* (17:79).[1]

Author's comment: "He will intercede even for those who have been burnt by the Fire" means "some of those who have been burnt by the Fire." There are also some similar Sunni narrations from the Prophet.

(13) Ibn ʿUmar has narrated: The Messenger of God said: "Indeed the sun will come near [on the Day of Resurrection] such that the people will be [inundated] up to half of their ears in their sweat . In that condition they will cry to Adam for help but he will say, 'I am not the person for this.' They will then turn to Moses, who will tell them the same, and then they will turn to Muḥammad." [Ibn ʿUmar continued:] He will intercede, God will judge between the people, and he will walk until he grabs on the ring on the gate of Paradise. That is when God will raise him to a praised station.[2]

(14) The Messenger of God said: The praised station means intercession.[3]

(15) When the Messenger of God was asked about the praised station (*al-maqām al-maḥmūd*), he said: It is intercession.[4]

Author's comment: There are many more narrations conveying the same idea.

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1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Samāʿah b. Mihrān.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ.

Verses 82-100

These verses go back once more to the topic of the Qur'an, how it is a sign of prophethood, and the mercy and blessing that it involves. This topic began above with the verse: *Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright…* (17:9), then it was resumed through a few verses later: *And certainly We have repeated (warnings) in this Qur'an that they may be mindful…* (17:41); *And when you recite the Qur'an…* (17:45); *And nothing could have hindered Us that We should release signs…* (17:59).

These verses say that the Qur'an is a healing and mercy. In other words, it is a source of rectitude for those who have righteous souls, but a source of loss for the wrongdoers. It is a sign of prophethood that no one can match. Then the verses mention the people's request for certain signs from the Prophet, the answer to their requests, and some relevant discussions in this regard.

The verses also refer to their question about the spirit and the answer to that.

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Commentary

وَ نُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ما هُوَ شِفاءٌ وَ رَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ لا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلاَّ خَساراً ﴿٨٢﴾

(17:82) *And We reveal of the Qur'an* (min al-Qur'an) *that which is a healing* (shifā') *and a mercy to the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the unjust.*

The particle *min* ("of" in "of the Qur'an") is a descriptive one. It interprets *"that which is a healing…"* The meaning is: We reveal that which is a healing and mercy, and that is the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is classified here as a *shifā'* (healing, cure, remedy), and healing is applicable where there is illness. This shows that the hearts have certain conditions and states that the Qur'an's relation to them would be that of a healing to illness. This is inferred from God's Book where He says that the true religion is an innate component of mankind's creation

[30:30]. In terms of the physical body, one who is originally born full and healthy remains so throughout the different stages of his life as long he is not afflicted by unfavorable conditions and events that are not compatible with his initial wellness. Likewise, the original creation of mankind possesses certain true beliefs concerning the origin, the end, and what they implicate in terms of other fundamental beliefs, as well as moral virtues that are in harmony with those beliefs and which entail certain actions and traits accordingly.

Hence, man has a spiritual health and an inward well-being just as he has a physical well-being that pertains to his outward form. Any disorder in his spiritual health will cause a spiritual disease and illness, just as any disorder in his physical health will cause a physical disease and illness. Similarly, for every malady there is remedy, and for every disorder there is a cure.

God has described some believers as having a disease in their heart. This disease is something different than sheer disbelief or hypocrisy as it can be inferred from: *If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease and the agitators in the city do not desist, We shall most certainly set you over them, then they shall not be your neighbors in it but for a little while* (33:60), and: *And that those in whose hearts is a disease and the unbelievers may say: What does Allah mean by this parable?* (74:31).

What is called disease here [in these Qur'anic verses] is nothing but what disturbs the heart's stability and the soul's consistency such as various forms of doubt and suspicion that agitate one inwardly, shake one's inmost secret, and incline one to accept what is false and pursue his desires. Such disease does not contradict the faith of the majority of believers who hold the lowest levels of faith, but it counts as imperfection and polytheism compared to the higher levels of faith. He says: *And most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others (with Him)* (12:196), and: *But no! by your Lord! they do not believe (in reality) until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straitness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with entire submission* (4:65).

Through its robust proofs and illuminating arguments, the Noble Qur'an removes every kind of doubt and misunderstanding that one may confront in pursuit of true beliefs and genuine teachings. Through its healing admonitions, stories, parables, lessons, promises, warnings, threats, glad tidings, laws and prescriptions, it dispels the diseases and defects of

the hearts. Hence, the Qur'an is a healing for the believers.

Mercy (*raḥmah*) is a bestowal that perfects an imperfection and fulfills a need. The Qur'an is a mercy because it illuminates the hearts by the light of knowledge and certitude after removing the darkness of ignorance, blindness, doubt and agitation from the hearts. It also adorns the hearts by moral virtues and pure and noble spiritual states after cleansing them of the defilements of base qualities and evil characteristics.

Therefore, in the sense that it is a healing, the Qur'an removes various kinds of disease and ailment from the hearts, and in the sense that it is a mercy, it makes the hearts regain their missing health and soundness that they originally and innately possessed. It is a healing because it purifies the place [that is, the hearts] from barriers that prevent one from felicity, and prepares the grounds to receive salvation. It is mercy because it dresses one's heart in the clothes of felicity and blesses it with the blessing of fortitude.

Thus, the Qur'an is a healing and mercy for the sick hearts, just as it is a guide and mercy to the souls that are not secure from misguidance. This clarifies why mercy is mentioned consequent to healing: *A healing and a mercy to the believers* (17:82). It is similar to His words: *And a guide and a mercy to a people who believe* (12:111); *And forgiveness and mercy* (4:96).

Based on the above, the meaning of *"And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers"* is: We reveal to you something that removes and heals the diseases of the hearts, and brings back to them the state of well-being and soundness, so that these hearts may enjoy the blessing of felicity and honor.

***…and it adds only to the perdition* (khasāran) *of the unjust* (al-ẓālimīn):** Given the context, what is meant here is the Qur'an's impact on nonbelievers, in contradistinction to its splendid effect on the believers. Therefore, unlike what some exegetes have suggested, "the unjust" here means all unbelievers, not just polytheists in particular. The verse has mentioned their attribute instead of their name in order to show the cause of this. That is: The Qur'an adds to their perdition because they are unjust—that is, unbelievers.

Khasār means a loss of one's capital or asset. This shows that the unbelievers initially have some asset, which is the innate religion that their unadulterated souls are originally inspired, but then this asset of theirs diminishes and they lose it due to disbelieving in God and His signs and communications.

Then their disbelief in the Qur'an and their unjust turning away from it will be additional loss and perdition—if there is anything of their innate gift left with them. That is why the verse says this in the form of an excepted negation: "It does not add to the unjust save perdition" instead of saying "It adds perdition to the unjust."[1]

Based on the above the gist of the verse is that the Qur'an adds to the health, soundness and felicity of the believers due to their belief, and if it adds anything to the unbelievers, it would only be loss and perdition.

The exegetes have suggested other meanings about both the first and the second halves of the verse that we shall pass. Interested readers should refer to their books of *tafsīr*.

One of their suggested interpretations is that healing in this verse includes the cure for both spiritual diseases—such as ignorance, doubt, hesitation, and moral vices—and physical diseases—by means of seeking blessing from the Qur'an in verbal and written forms.

There is no problem with this interpretation, but to be consistent, this line of reasoning should be applied not only to both the beginning of the verse, but also to the end. It means that just as the recitation and writing of the verses can protect [the believers] against pain and disease, they can also protect [them] against the injustice of the unjust and the machinations of the unbelievers. That is how the verses add to the perdition of the unjust, just as they benefit the believers by healing.

It should be noted that attributing the addition of perdition to the Qur'an is a metaphorical ascription,[2] because in reality this added perdition is due to their own wrongdoing and evil voluntary decision.

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَأَىٰ بِجَانِبِهِ ۖ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ كَانَ يَئُوسًا ﴿٨٣﴾

(17:83) ***And when We bestow favor on man, he turns aside*** **(aʿraḍa)** ***and behaves proudly*** **(naʾā bi-jānibihi),** ***and when evil afflicts him, he is despairing.***

1 The current translation reflects this excepted negation by the use of the word "only." (Trans.)

2 It is a metaphorical ascription because their increased perdition occurs when they confront the Qur'an and disobey it. Therefore, it is as if the Qur'an has added to their error. (Trans.)

Al-Mufradāt says:

ʿArḍ (width) is the opposite of *ṭūl* (length). Its original usage was for physical objects, but then it came to be used about other things as well… *Aʿraḍa* means to show one's *ʿarḍ*, that is, one's side. *Aʿraḍa lī* means that the side of something or someone showed up to me such that I can reach it. *Aʿraḍa ʿannī* means he turned away from me, an act that shows the person's side.

Naʾy means distance. *Naʾā bi-jānibihi* means: He distanced himself and went far from us. Overall, *"aʿraḍa wa naʾā bi-jānibihi"* compares one's condition in distancing himself and cutting from his Lord when He bestows favor upon him to one who turns his face aside from someone else and goes far away from him. Some exegetes have said that *naʾā bi-jānibihi* is a metaphorical way of describing pride and vainglory.

…and when evil afflicts him* (massahu)*, he is despairing: That is: When evil afflicts him slightly—like a touch (mass)—he despairs and loses hope of good, that is, favor (*niʿmah*). Unlike the bestowal of favor, the verse does not attribute the affliction of evil to God in order to set Him clear from ascription of evil. Furthermore, evil is something relative, not absolute. What is considered as evil in the world—such as death, disease, poverty, loss, and so on—is evil only with respect to one who is afflicted with it; but with respect to others, especially the general system that governs the universe, it is good and it is something unavoidable in the general direction of affairs. What is intended primarily and for itself is good, which is a direct object of God's decree. Evil is that which is intended accidentally [that is, not for itself]; it is decreed [by God] because of something else.

The implied meaning is: When We bestow favor on man, he gets caught up with the apparent means and clings to them as he is a being that lives in the world of means and instruments. As a result he forgets Us and fails to remember and thank Us. And when the slightest evil reaches him, he is stripped of some good, and he finds himself missing the means to that, then he intensely despairs of good. This is because he is attached to the means of good and now he sees the loss of those means but he does not see any role for his Lord in this.

This verse describes the condition of an ordinary individual living in a society that is governed by common norms and habits. If divine favors and blessings like wealth, power, children and so on are showered upon such an individual—that is, if he find the apparent means and instruments to achieve these blessings—then his heart attaches to those blessings and

he becomes completely engaged with these means. This attachment and engagement leave him no opportunity to remember and thank his Lord for what He has blessed him with. On the other hand, if some evil afflicts such a person and he loses some of the blessings that he had been given, then he despairs of good. He is not solaced by any hope [in God] because in his view there are no means to good except the apparent ones, and he has completely lost them at that point.

This is different from the condition of an individual who maintains his primary nature (*fiṭrah*), whose mind is no adulterated by customs and conventions, and who is not governed by social norms and habits. This preservation of the primary nature can be either due to being constantly strengthened by a special aid from God, or by the occurrence of some distress and emergency that makes him forget the apparent means, return to his pure *fiṭrah*, call his Lord and ask Him to remove his distress. In other words, mankind can be in either of two conditions: 1. their innate state (*fiṭrah*), which guides them to turn to their Lord upon the affliction of distress and the occurrence of evil; and 2. their accustomed state, where the apparent means veil them from their Lord, keep them engaged, and prevent them from returning to Him by remembrance and gratitude. This verse describes the second state, not the first.

This shows that there is no contradiction between this verse and other verses that say mankind return to their Lord when they are afflicted by evil, such as what He said above: *And when distress afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call on except He* (17:67), as well as: *And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing…* (10:12), and so on.

This also shows the connection between this verse and the previous one: This verse connects to the last part of the previous verse: *It adds only to the perdition of the unjust* (17:82). The implied meaning is: Loss and perdition is not far from these unjust individuals because their condition is that of being engaged by the apparent means whenever they are showered by divine favors, which results in them turning aside from their Lord and behaving proudly, and despairing whenever they are afflicted by evil.

A Philosophical Discussion: The Application of Divine Decree to Evils

According to [some] Muslim scholars, evils come under divine decree by

accident[1] (*bil-ʿaraḍ*). Here is how they have explained this:

It has been narrated from Plato that evil is non-existential. He has justified this through some examples. For instance, when someone is killed by a sword, there is no evil in the killer's power to strike with a sword; there is no evil in his courage; there is no evil in the strength of the muscles of his hand. All of these are perfections. There is also no evil in the sharpness and acuteness of the sword's edge which cuts through tissue, because that is a perfection and excellence for a sword. Nor is there any evil in the neck of the victim being susceptible to a cutting instrument, because that is a perfection for the neck. Therefore, there remains no evil except in the fact that through this act the victim's life has ended and his soul has departed from his body, which is a non-existential matter. The same applies to other examples, and this proves that evil is non-existential.

At the same time, evil is not separable from what actually occurs in the world; evil occurs under the shade of other events. That is why evil is not absolutely non-existential, but relatively non-existential. Evil events have some share of existence and occurrence, such as various kinds of loss, deficiency, death and corruption that occur in the outside world. They all occur under the general system of the universe and thus they are somehow subject to God's decree which governs the world, except that they come under God's decree accidentally and by virtue of other [existential] events, not essentially and by themselves.

This is because there are two conceivable types of nonexistence: 1. absolute nonexistence, which is the opposite of existence; and 2. nonexistence of some possession (*malakah*), which would be the lack of some existential perfection in a subject that has the capacity of having that perfection. For example, blindness is the nonexistence of sight in a subject that can be sighted.

About the first type, if you take the nonexistence of a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in and of itself—such as the nonexistence of some Zayd that you have imagined—then it is only a mental conception. There is no evil in this sense of nonexistence because it does not apply to a subject that really exists. Now, if this nonexistence applies to a real thing—like the

1 Here, "accident" is employed in its logical sense, meaning a property of a thing that is not essential to its nature. Accidents are the opposite of "essentials" (*dhātiyyāt*), which are qualities that build up the very nature and reality of an object's *māhiyyah* (quiddity, whatness, essence). (Trans.)

nonexistence of Zayd after he has existence—then it would be an evil, but it will effectively reduce to the second type of nonexistence which is in relation to some possession; this we shall discuss below.

This first type of nonexistence could also be relative to other things. For example, contingent quiddities lack the perfection of the Necessary Being, and each quiddity lacks the specific existence of other quiddities. For example, plants lack the existence of animals, and the cow misses the existence of the horse. This form of nonexistence is a necessary characteristic of quiddities[1] and is a matter of mental derivation, not something created and existentiated.

The second type is nonexistence of some possession or property that would be a perfection for the existence of a subject that has the capacity of possessing that quality. Some examples of this type of nonexistence are various kinds of corruption, shortcoming, defect, deficiency, ailment, disease and pain that happen to things and apply to them as accidents. This type of nonexistence only occurs in material subjects. It is not ascribable to the Donor of Existence, but to a lack of capacity on the recipient's side. Of course, the recipients have their various degrees. This idea is because the cause of a non-existential matter is also something non-existential, just as the cause of an existential matter is something existential.

In every event and entity, what is primarily decreed and essentially willed by God to be created is the what comes to existence, in everything according to its capacity and degree of receptivity, not the evil that may be concomitant of that event and entity. The deficiency and nonexistence that is concomitant of it is only attributable to the subject's lack of capacity and limited receptivity. This deficiency and limitation is sometimes said to be "created" or "bestowed" accidentally because it is in a way united with the existential aspect of the subject.

In other words, events are of five types: 1. things that are purely good; 2. things whose good is more than their evil; 3. things whose good and evil are equal; 4. things whose evil is more than their good; and 5. things that are purely evil. The last three types never come to existence because they either entail choosing something over another without any determinant, or choosing the inferior over the superior. God's wisdom that is rooted in His infinite power, knowledge and generosity—which are not separable

1 Because each quiddity has its own specific definition and limited determination. (Trans.)

from Him—necessitates that He would create what is the best in the most perfect system, and that He existentiates what is either purely good or its good is more than its evil. Not creating the first would be a pure evil and not creating the second would be a great evil.

Therefore, the evil that is found is rare and little compared to the good that is found, and that little evil comes to existence thanks to the great good and because of it.

Imam al-Rāzī has raised the following objection: There is no place for such a discussion by the philosophers because they believe that God is the complete cause of the universe and a cause cannot be separated from its effect. Therefore, what He does is out of compulsion, not out of will. As a cause He necessarily brings about His effect, and this is not a matter of choice or preference.

What he has failed to realize is that this necessity of coming to existence applies to the effect [not the cause], and the effect receives this necessity from its cause just as it receives its very existence from the cause. It is rationally impossible for something that emanates from the cause to turn back and dominate the cause and compel it to do something and overcome it by some confinement.

The author of *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* has done justice as he has referred to a similar discussion to the above and said:

> This discussion is based on the view that it is not possible for His will to have an equal relation to an event and its opposite without any consideration or expediency, and this is what the Ashʿarites believe.
>
> Otherwise, it has been said that if the Perfect Doer has a will, then it is up to Him to choose anything of good or evil that He wishes. However, the sages and pillars of Islam have clarified that God's will is far above this. The affairs of this world follow some universal laws, while His actions are tied to certain wisdoms and welfare that are sometimes known to us and sometimes unknown. …The Imam [al-Rāzī] has said, "The philosophers believe that God's actions are performed out of necessity and compulsion. Therefore their immersion in this discourse is redundant and erroneous, because the question of 'why' is not applicable to His actions just as it is not applicable ask, 'Why does the fire burn?' for it is a matter of its essence and nature." This statement of his

is biased because the scholars among philosophers do believe in God's will and choice in His actions. They do not view God's actions like the burning of fire. Even if we concede to this, their discussion of how evil has come to be in the universe is still applicable because according to the philosophers the Creator is purely and simply good, and evil cannot emanate from something that has no aspect of evil to it whatsoever. Therefore, their view [of acting out of compulsion and necessity] would implicate what the dualists have said, that there are two causes in the universe, one for good and one for evil. Hence, they would have to refute this implication, which makes their discussion of this topic a plus, not a surplus.

قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَىٰ شَاكِلَتِهِ فَرَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٤﴾

(17:84) ***Say: Every one acts according to his character* (shākilatihi)*; but your Lord best knows who is best guided in the path.***

According to *al-Mufradāt*, *mushākalah* is derived from *shakl*, which is to tie an animal. What is used to tie an animal is called a *shikāl*. *Shākilah* refers to one's manner and character in the sense that it ties and restrains the person to follow what it dictates and implicates.

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Shākilah* means way and path. When it is said that this road has *shawākil*, it means that it divides and branches into paths of different groups.

Apparently using the word *shākilah* for a path is because the path confines those who enter and follow it to stick to it and not transgress beyond it. It has also been said that *shākilah* is derived from *shakl*, meaning example. Others have said that it is derived from *shikl*, meaning form.[1]

Either way, the verse is describing mankind's action as a consequence of his *shākilah*, meaning that one's action complies and agrees with his *shākilah*. The relation of *shākilah* to action is the relation of spirit to body. The spirit permeates the body and the body's organs and movements

1 Hence, *shākilah* can be translated as character, frame, makeup, or formation. (Trans.)

reflect the immaterial shape of the spirit. It has been proven by experience as well as scientific studies that there is a special link between one's spiritual [that is, psychological] characteristics and his actions. For example, in a situation of fear, a brave and lionhearted individual does not act the same way as a timid person. When it comes to charity and donation, a benevolent and generous person does not act the same way as stingy niggard, and so on. There is also some special relationship between one's psychological characteristics and his physical makeup. For example, some physical temperaments are naturally prone to anger and love of vengeance. Others are quickly excited and burst in lust for food, sex or some other desire, such that the slightest incentive and stimulation will create a strong craving in the person's soul for that desire. Thus, different individuals may be quick or slow with regard to different characteristics according to their personal makeups.

Despite this, these physical makeups that are in harmony with some characteristics and actions more so than others are not the complete cause of that characteristic or action, but are only at the level of propensity and tendency (*iqtiḍāʾ*) toward it. They do not annul one's free will, and they do not reduce the possibility of acting otherwise to impossibility. Hence, one still has choice in his actions although some actions may be extremely difficult.

Contemplating God's words confirm this, as He says: *And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth (abundantly) by the permission of its Lord, and (as for) that which is inferior (its herbage) comes forth but scantily* (7:58). *Adding this verse to verses that assert the universality of the religious call—such as: And this Qur'an has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches* (6:19)—it can be clearly seen that the impact of one's physical makeup and temperament on his traits and actions is at the level of propensity, not complete causation.

How could it be otherwise when God counts religion as something innate and a matter of our primary nature that is demanded by our fixed and unchanging creation? He says: *Then set your face upright for religion in the right state—the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion* (30:30), and: *Then (as for) the way—He has made it easy (for him)* (80:20). If one's primary nature (*fiṭrah*) calls him to the true religion and the balanced custom, it cannot be that his physical makeup would compel him—as a complete cause—to deviation and transgression from this balance.

Some have said that salvation and damnation are essential qualities of the individuals that are inseparable from their concomitants, just as evenness and oddness are inseparable essential qualities for four and three, respectively.[1] Alternatively, they are ordained by an unavoidable eternal decree. As with the call of religions, it is only to complete [God's] proof and argument against mankind, not that there is a possibility of change or a hope for transformation from one state to another, because the matter has already been determined and settled. He says: *That he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof* (8:42).

This is not true because the mere fact that some proof or argument is being presented proves that the salvation of the felicitous and the damnation of the wretched are not necessary concomitants of their essences. Otherwise, there would have been no need for any proof in order to apply them to their corresponding essences, because proofs are not applicable to the essential qualities of things. Therefore such proof and argument would be vain. And if salvation and damnation are concomitants of individuals by an eternal decree—not as essential qualities—then it would be the people who would have proof and argument against God [not vice versa]. That would again make His argument futile. God's proof and arguments [against His servants] are applicable, and this shows that salvation and wretchedness are by no means necessary essential qualities of the individuals irrespective of their actions being good or bad, or their beliefs being true or false.

Furthermore, we see that the inherent human nature has led human beings to conduct their lives by means of education, training, warning, promise, threat, glad tiding, command, prohibition, and so on. This is the clearest proof which shows that the human being in and of himself is at the crossing point of two paths: one leading to salvation and the other leading to damnation, and it is possible for him to choose and follow the path that he wants and prefers. Every effort has an appropriate reward to it; He says: *And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for-And that his striving shall soon be seen-Then shall he be rewarded for it with the fullest reward* (53:39-41). So far we said that one's actions and characteristics are related to one's essence. There is also another link: between one's actions and characteristics and one's external conditions, factors and

1 This means that we cannot have a "four" that is not even. (Trans.)

circumstances. These factors are what constitute the environment and setting in which a person lives, and they fall beyond one's essence. Some examples are inherited norms, customs, traditions and habits. They too urge the person to abide by them and not violate them. It does not take long before one forms a new paradigm in his mind according to these social and external conditions that surround him, and starts setting his life and actions according to them.

This relationship is also at the level of propensity and tendency, except that sometimes the vices or virtues that these factors create in one's soul become so firmly rooted and established that there is no more hope in removing them. He has referred to this in His Book like where He says: *Surely those who disbelieve, it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them* (2:6-7), and so on. Meanwhile, this does not contradict the applicability of presenting proofs against them through religious call, warning and glad tiding, because the impossibility of this call having any impact on them is due to their evil choice, and a chosen impossibility does not contradict choice.

We can summarize the long discussion above as follows: Man has two *shākilahs* (character, makeup, formation) that one mounts on the other. He has an initial character which is according to the way he is created and how his body is composed. This gives him a personality and morality based on the interaction of his physical faculties—including one's physical temperament (*mizāj*), which is one's health condition that is a net result of several opposing factors and qualities in the body.

Then he has a second character, which is a personality and morality that is based on the impressions of one's external conditions on his soul. This adds to his initial character—if there was any.

No matter what kind of character one has and what qualities have been actualized and realized in one's soul, the person's actions follow his character and are reflective and indicative of it. For example, if one is a proud and arrogant, then his speech, silence, standing, sitting, moving and stopping would be reflections of his character and allude to it. Likewise, the abasement and humiliation of an abased and humiliated person are evident in all of his actions, and the same goes with other characters like courage, timidity, generosity, stinginess, patience, dignity, rashness, and so on. How could it be otherwise when action is a representation of the

actor, the apparent is a sign of the hidden, and the form is an indication of the meaning?

His words confirm this and His arguments in many places are based on this idea. For example He says: *And the blind and the seeing are not alike, Nor the darkness and the light, Nor the shade and the heat, Neither are the living and the dead alike* (35:19-22); *Bad women are for bad men and bad men are for bad women. Good women are for good men and good men are for good women* (24:26), and many other verses.

Whichever of the two meanings of *shākilah* that we take, the meaning of *"Every one acts according to his character"* (17:84) would be clear and decisive (*muḥkam*). However, this verse is said in a context where God was speaking of how He benefits and cures the believers by the Noble Qur'an and the call of truth, while He adds to the loss of the wrongdoers due to their wrongdoing, as He says: *And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the unjust* (17:82). Given this context, the second meaning of *shākilah* is more likely, which is one's character, personality and morality that is the sum total of one's physical makeup as well as the external factors that build one's character.[1]

It is as if the verse is an answer to an objection that may be raised here. Since God spoke about the believers obtaining healing and mercy from His Book while it only adds to the perdition of the unjust, one could object: Why does not God give that healing and mercy equally to both groups? Would that not achieve the purpose of messengership and benefit His call better? So He orders His Messenger to answer this objection here.

Thus He says: *Say: Every one acts according to his character…* (17:84). That is: Your actions proceed from you according your current actualized character within you. Whoever possesses a just character will easily be guided to the right word and righteous act, and will benefit from the call of truth. And whoever possesses an unjust character will find it difficult to adopt the right word and righteous act, and the call of truth will only add to his perdition. Your Lord God—Who knows what you hold within and is the Director of your affairs—best knows who possesses a just character, is best guided in the path, and is closest to the word of truth. Likewise the one whom God has taught and informed [that is, His

1 The first meaning of *shākilah* was one's character according to the way he is created and how his body is composed. (Trans.)

Prophet] also knows that it is indeed the believers who are best guided in the path. That is why the healing and mercy that accompany the Qur'an that He has sent down are exclusively for them, which leaves nothing but increased perdition for unbelievers—the unjust—unless they cease their injustice and thus benefit from the Qur'an.

This also shows why the verse says *ahdā* in comparative (lit. "better guided").[1] As mentioned above, one's character does not necessitate him to follow the course that complies with it. Although an unjust character calls to misguidance and evil action, it does not necessitate it. In this sense it involves some trace of guidance, albeit weak. A just character would be more guided compared to that. Contemplate this.[2]

Here is a summary of what al-Imam al-Rāzī has said in his *Tafsīr*:

> This verse shows that the souls of human beings differ in terms of quiddity (*māhiyyah*). This is inferred because in the previous verse He said that the Qur'an brings about healing and mercy for some souls but perdition and failure for others, then He says right away: *Say: Every one acts according to his character* (17:84). It means that the pure souls are such that they show signs of intelligence and perfection in reaction to the Qur'an, while the impure souls are such that they show signs of failure and misguidance. Much like the sun which causes salt to solidify and stiffen but causes fat or butter to soften, or makes the laundry man's white clothes to glow whiter but tans the man's face.
>
> This can only be if the human souls differ in quiddity: some of them are pure and luminous such that the Qur'an adds light to their light, but some are dark and murky such that the Qur'an only adds loss to their loss and torment to their torment.

If it is proven that human souls differ in quiddity after their characters and properties are firmly rooted in them and their formation is fixed, then the above argument could apply at that stage. However, souls in their initial simple stage before the rootage of their acquired characters and

1 It could also be in superlative, meaning "best guided," and the author's point would still be applicable. The superlative and comparative forms in Arabic are the same. (Trans.)

2 Another possibility is that *ahdā* here indicates *taʿyīn*, not *tafḍīl*. That is, it *determines* the quality of guidance (*hidāyah*) for one side *alone*, as opposed to asserting a *higher degree* of it for one side *relative* to the other. (Trans.)

second natures do not differ as much as necessitating different signs and reactions. Therefore, his argument does not apply to souls at that stage. At any rate, by now it should be clear to you [as we discussed in detail above] that the verse concerns the condition of mankind after the formation of his personal character and morality, which is a combination of his natural faculties as well as his external conditions that affect him, and this character of mankind calls for a certain course of action only at the level of propensity and tendency [not complete causation]. Contemplate this.

A Philosophical Discussion: Congruence Between Action and Actor

The philosophers say that there is an existential congruence and an essential relationship between an action and its actor—that is, an effect and its efficient cause (*al-ʿillat al-fāʿiliyyah*). The existence of the action is a lower degree of the existence of its actor, and the existence of the actor is a higher degree of the existence of the action. This is indeed the case according to the principality of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and its gradation (*tashkīk*).

They have explained this as follows: Suppose there is no essential relationship between an act which is the effect, and its actor which is the efficient cause; there is no real quality that specifically ties one to the other. In that case, the relation of the actor to its act would be like its relation to any other act, and the relation of the act to the actor will be like its relation to any other agent. This would make the attribution of this specific act to this specific actor void. The same argument applies to any effect and its other types of causes.[1] What is special with the efficient cause is that it is what demands the existence of the effect (called *al-muqtaḍī*), and the giver of something cannot lack it. It thus follows that the efficient cause must possess the existential perfection of the effect, and the effect would be existentially similar to it, but at a lower degree.

Mullā Ṣadrā has elucidated this in a finer and subtler way: The effect needs the efficient cause for its very existence; its essence is attached to the efficient cause. This need and attachment cannot be at a level subsequent

1 Another type of cause that all effects have is the final or intended cause (*al-ʿillat al-ghāʾiyyah*). There are two more types of causes in material beings: the material cause (*al-ʿillat al-mādiyyah*) and the formal cause (*al-ʿillat al-ṣūriyyah*). (Trans.)

to the essence of the effect. Otherwise, that would mean that the effect has its essence at one level, and then has need at another level, which would mean that in and of itself the effect is needless and independent of its cause. This is equivalent to the effect not being an effect, which is a contradiction. Hence, the very essence of an effect is need and attachment. This means that the existence of an effect is the very connection that it has (*rābiṭ*) to its cause, and it is not independent of it. The independent existence that the effect seems to have at first sight is really the independence of its cause, because the existence of the effect reflects the existence of its cause and represents it in its own [lower] plane of existence.

Continuing the Above Discussion from a Qur'anic Point of View

Contemplating the verses of the Qur'an leaves no doubt that the Noble Qur'an considers all things, notwithstanding their variety and different kinds, to be signs of God that point to His names and attributes. Everything is a sign (*āyah*) of God in its entire existence and in any aspect of its existence that is taken; it points to His Precinct of grandeur and magnificence. *Āyah* means sign, indication, mark, signal. The existence of a sign, inasmuch as it is a sign, is a reflecting existence (*al-wujūd al-mirʾātī*, like a mirror). The image in the mirror is not independent of the real object that stands in front of the mirror and which the mirror reflects. If something were to be independent in its existence or in some aspect of its existence, then in that aspect it would not be a sign that indicates and points to Him. That would be a contradiction.[1]

Therefore, since all things are created by God, they are His acts (*afʿāl*); their existence and their existential attributes show His existence and His noble attributes. This is what is meant by congruence between an action and its actor. Otherwise, the claim that an act possesses the existence of its actor and the reality of its essence is evidently incorrect.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ ۖ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾

1 Because it was already stated that the Qur'an considers everything to be a sign of God in all of its existential aspects. (Trans.).

(17:85) *And they ask you about the spirit* (al-rūḥ). *Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little.*

Rūḥ (soul, spirit) is lexically defined as the source of life by which animals have sensation and voluntary movement. The term is used for both masculine and feminine. Sometimes it is used metaphorically for things that have good and desirable results, such as knowledge that is like life for the soul. He says: *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life* (6:122), where life means being guided to faith. It is based on this meaning that some exegetes have interpreted *rūḥ* as revelation in the verse: *He sends down the angels with the spirit* (bil-rūḥ) *of His commandment* (16:2). Likewise they have interpreted *rūḥ* as the Qur'an which is a revelation in the verse: *And thus did We reveal to you a spirit* (rūḥan) *of Our command* (42:52). They have said that He has called the Qur'an and revelation "spirit" in the sense that they are the [true] life of souls that are otherwise dead, just as the conventional spirit is life for bodies that are otherwise dead.

At any rate, the term *rūḥ* has appeared repeatedly in many verses in His Book, both Meccan and Medinite verses, and it does not always mean the soul that is found in animals as the source of life by which the animal has sensation and voluntary movement. This is seen in verses like: *The day on which the spirit* (al-rūḥ) *and the angels shall stand in ranks* (78:38), and: *The angels and the spirit* (al-rūḥ) *descend in it by the permission of their Lord for every affair* (97:4). It is evident that *rūḥ* in these two verses is neither the animal soul nor the angels. We already quoted a hadith above [under verse 16:2] where ʿAlī refers to the verse: *He sends down the angels with the spirit* (bil-rūḥ) *by His commandment on whom He wills of His servants* (16:2) in order to show that *rūḥ* is not the same as the angels. God has sometimes described *rūḥ* with the attribute of sanctity (*quds*) and sometimes with the attribute of trustworthiness (*amānah*), as we shall quote below. This shows the purity of the *rūḥ* from disloyalty and other spiritual impurities and defilements that are sometimes found in human souls.

Furthermore, even though the spirit is not the same as the angels, it accompanies them when they descend with revelation to convey God's message. This is understood from His words: *He sends down the angels with the spirit by His commandment on whom He wills of His servants* (16:2).

He also says: Say: *Whoever is the enemy of Gabriel – for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah's command* (2:97), where He attributes

the revelation of Qur'an on the Prophet's heart to Gabriel. Elsewhere He says: *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it, upon your heart that you may be of the warners, in plain Arabic language* (26:193-195), and: *Say: The Holy spirit has revealed it from your Lord with the truth* (16:102), where He has attributed the same [act of revelation of Qur'an] to the spirit, which is something different than the angels, while the other verse [2:97] attributes this to Gabriel, which is one of the angels. This shows that Gabriel descends with the spirit and the spirit is the one who carries this Qur'an which is read and recited.

The above explanation also clarifies the ambiguity in the verse: *And thus did We reveal to you a spirit* (rūḥan) *of Our command* (42:52). What is meant by the "revelation of spirit" here is the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Prophet, which is accompanied by the revelation of Qur'an to him because the Holy Spirit is the carrier of the Qur'an as we just said. Therefore there is no need to interpret the spirit in this verse as the Qur'an as some exegetes have done.[1]

Now, revelation is a covert communication, while the spirit, as we have defined, is a real external being. Yet, there is no problem in talking about the "revelation" of spirit [in verse 42:52] because in the sense that these immaculate beings are God's sacred creatures they are His word, much like what He has said about Jesus son of Mary: *And His Word which He communicated to Mary and a spirit from Him* (4:171). In this verse, the spirit [that is, Jesus] has been called a "word" because a word is that which indicates an intended meaning. In like manner it is also permissible to call the spirit "revelation." God has called Jesus "His word" because He was created directly by His word of existentiation [that is, "Be!"] without the involvement of the ordinary means in his creation. This is seen where He says: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was* (3:59).

God has further clarified the reality of the spirit by saying, *"Say: The spirit is of* (min) *the commands* (amr) *of my Lord"* (17:85). Apparently the particle *min* (lit. "of") is indicative of the genus of the subject, meaning that the spirit is of the type and nature of divine command. The same sense of particle *min* applies to the other similar verses: *He casts the spirit of*

1 The above paragraphs are worth rereading and contemplation. They show the author's masterful combination of all applications of *rūḥ* in the Qur'an in order to deduce a single consistent interpretation. (Trans.)

(min) *His command upon whom He pleases of His servants* (40:15); *He sends down the angels with the spirit of* (min) *His command* (16:2); *We reveal to you a spirit of* (min) *Our command* (42:52); *The angels and the spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord of* (min) *every affair* (97:4).

Then He has defined His command where He says: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things* (36:82-83). This shows that His command is His address to something: "Be!" which is His existentiating word (*kalimat al-ījād*). Existentiation (*ījād*) is the existence of something but specifically in the sense that it is related to Him and depends on Him. Therefore, His word is the same as His action [of creation].

He says: *And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye* (54:50). This verse is part of the evidence to the idea that the existents are His words in the sense that they are related to Him irrespective of the physical means, because the verse first says that His command is one, and then compares it to the twinkling of an eye.[1] This comparison is to deny gradualness. Thus we can know that there are two aspects to the things in the physical world: 1. a gradual aspect that is due to the involvement of physical means that operate in time and space; and 2. a non-gradual aspect that is beyond the domain of time and space. The second aspect is what makes something His command, word and speech. The first aspect—that is, the gradual aspect of things that is related to the physical means and corresponds to time and space—is called "creation" (*khalq*). He says: *Surely His is the creation and the command* (7:54). Therefore, "command" is the existence of something in terms of its relation to Him alone [directly], and "creation" is the existence of something in terms of its relation to Him through physical means and instruments.

This can also be inferred from His words: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was* (3:59), because the verse first mentions the "creation" aspect (*khalq*) of Adam and ties it to dust, which was a material means [in the creation of his body], but then mentions his existence without tying it to anything other than His word, "Be!" Contemplate this.

Another example is: *Then We made the seed a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh…then We caused it to grow into another creation* (23:14).

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1 A similar and more relevant verse in this regard is: *Our word for a thing when We intend it, is only that We say to it, Be, and it is* (16:40). (Trans.)

Here He refers to the aspect of creation that does not involve any physical means as "another creation."

The above discussion shows that the divine "command" (*amr*) is a transcendent existentiating word. It is an act of God that is exclusively attributable to Him without the involvement of any means and without any dimension of time, space, and so on.

Verses 36:82-83 [quoted above] also show that His command in everything is the *malakūt* (dominion, kingdom) of that thing, where *malakūt* is an exaggerated form of *mulk* (kingdom, sovereignty). Therefore, there is a *malakūt* for everything just as there is a command for it. He says: *Do they not consider the kingdom* (malakūt) *of the heavens and the earth* (7:185); *And thus did We show Ibrahim the kingdom* (malakūt) *of the heavens and the earth* (6:75); *The angels and the spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord for every affair* (97:4).[1]

Based on what we said above it should now be clear that God's command is His existentiating word, which is an act of Him that exclusively belongs to Him without the involvement of any physical means and their gradual effects. The command is an existent that transcends the realm of nature and time. The spirit (*al-rūḥ*) has the same nature of existence as this command which belongs to the *malakūt* of things.

God has described the spirit in different ways throughout His Book. Sometimes He has mentioned it as a separate entity, like His words: *The day on which the spirit* (al-rūḥ) *and the angels shall stand in rank* (78:38), and: *To Him ascend the angels and the Spirit* (al-rūḥ)… (70:4).

Some verses show that the spirit sometimes accompanies the angels, like the verses that we discussed above: *Say: Whoever is the enemy of Jibreel – for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah's command* (2:97), *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it, upon your heart* (26:193-194); *Say: The Holy spirit has revealed it* (16:102), *as well as: Then We sent to her Our spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man* (19:17).

There is also a spirit that is blown into mankind in general. He says: *Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit* (32:9), and: *So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72).

There is also a spirit that accompanies the believers, as deduced from

1 In these discussions the *malakūt* of something means its divine and transcendent aspect, as opposed to its material and temporal existence. (Trans.)

His words: *And whom He has strengthened with an inspiration* (bi-rūḥin) *from Him* (58:22). The following verse also implicitly suggests—or rather explicitly shows—this idea: *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people* (6:122), because this verse talks about a new life, and life is an offshoot of spirit.

Some verses talk about the spirit that God descended upon the prophets, as seen in His words: *He sends down the angels with the spirit* (bil-rūḥ) *by His commandment on whom He pleases of His servants, saying: Give the warning* (16:2); *And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear arguments and strengthened him with the holy spirit* (2:87); *And thus did We reveal to you a spirit* (rūḥan) *of our command* (42:52) and so on.

We can also add the verses that talk about the life of non-human beings like animals and plants as alluding to spirit, because life is apparently a result of having a spirit.

Based on our elaborate discussion above, the meaning of *"And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85) should now be clear. The question in this verse pertains to the nature and reality of the spirit in general as found in His Book. The answer given in the verse explains the reality of spirit as something that is of the nature of God's command—in the sense that we said above.

…and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little: That is: The knowledge that God has given you about the spirit is only a little of a lot, for indeed you are veiled of the spirit's lofty position, its wonderful characteristics, and its magnificent effects in the universe.

The exegetes have different views about the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) that is a subject of question and answer in this verse. Some have said: What is meant by spirit here is the spirit that God has mentioned in these verses: *The day on which the spirit* (al-rūḥ) *and the angels shall stand in rank* (78:38), and: *To Him ascend the angels and the Spirit* (al-rūḥ)… (70:4). However, they have not provided any reason for this.

Some have said: Spirit here means Gabriel, because God has named him spirit where He says: *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it, upon your heart* (26:193-194). The problem with this is that merely calling Gabriel spirit in some place does not mean that wherever there is a mention of spirit it means Gabriel. In addition, this very naming [of Gabriel as spirit] has a special meaning that we discussed above. Otherwise, Jesus and Gabriel should have been the same because both have been called spirit.

Some have said: *Rūḥ* here means Qur'an, because God has named it

rūḥ where He says: *And thus did We reveal to you a spirit* (rūḥan) *of our command* (42:52). Thus, what is essentially being said is: "They inquire you about the Qur'an—whether it is from God or from yourself. So tell them in reply: It is of the command of my Lord; no one else can bring anything like it, which makes it a sign and miracle that shows the truth of the message. You have been given only a little share of knowledge about the Qur'an without encompassing it, and that is why you cannot bring anything like it." These exegetes have argued that the next verse confirms this interpretation: *And if We please, We should certainly take away that which We have revealed to you* (17:86).

The problem with this view is that as we just said, calling something *rūḥ* in some place does not mean that it is the intended meaning wherever there is a mention of *rūḥ*. Moreover, the claim that the Qur'an has been called *rūḥ* [in verse 42:52] is not true, as we discussed above. Finally, this is not the only possible interpretation that complies with the next verse, but the verse also matches other interpretations [as discussed below].

Some have said: *Rūḥ* here means the human spirit which is the first meaning that comes to the mind when "the spirit" is mentioned in an unconditional form. Then, "Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord" is a way of abstaining from answering this question and advising the audience not to delve into the reality of the spirit, because it is part of God's command that He has exclusively assigned to Himself and has not let anyone on its reality. Then the exegetes have disagreed about the reality of spirit. Some have claimed that it is a gaseous material substance that moves within the openings of the body. Some have said that it is a gaseous material substance in the shape of the body that has been incarnated in it and will leave the body upon its death. Some have said that it is an elementary part of the heart. Some have said that it is one of the accidents of the body. Some have said that it is the selfsame body, and so on.

The problem with this view is that this meaning is not the first meaning of *al-rūḥ* in the Qur'an that comes to the mind. Also, our discussion above refutes all of their subsequent claims.

Some have said: The verse is about *al-rūḥ* in an absolute sense in His Book. The question is about if this *rūḥ* is originated (*muḥdath*, *ḥādith*) or pre-eternal (*qadīm*). The answer is that it originates from His command, meaning that it is an act of God, and His acts are originated, not pre-eternal.

The first part of this claim—that the verse concerns all instances of

rūḥ in His Book—is correct, but there is no evidence in the wording of the verse to justify the claim that the question and answer concern the *rūḥ* being originated or pre-eternal.

Then the exegetes have also disagreed about *"The spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85): some have taken this to be a positive answer to the question, and some have interpreted it as abstention from answering and deferring the question. This difference is based on their abovementioned views about the meaning of *rūḥ*, where some interpretations of the *rūḥ* imply the first view, and some of them necessitate the second. We referred to these implications above.

There is also disagreement about the audience of *"You are not given aught of knowledge but a little"* (17:85). Some have said that it addresses the Jews—or alternatively Quraysh, on the assumption that they asked this question by the instruction of the Jews. Others have said that it addresses the Prophet and all of the people. The flow of the verse suggests that this is a continuation of the Prophet's answer to the inquirers. These inquirers were the Jews because they were known at the time for [religious] knowledge and the verse implicitly confirms some level of knowledge for them. This does not apply to Quraysh and pagan Arabs because He has referred to them elsewhere as "those who have no knowledge."[1]

وَلَئِنْ شِئْنَا لَنَذْهَبَنَّ بِالَّذِى أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ بِهِ عَلَيْنَا وَكِيلًا ﴿٨٦﴾

(17:86) ***And if We please, We should certainly take away that which We have revealed to you, then you would not find for it any protector*** **(wakīlan)** ***against Us.***

This verse is connected to the previous discussion. Even though the last verse was about the spirit in general—including all of its multiple aspects and levels—the topic of the previous verses was the Qur'an. Hence, the first and foremost application of spirit in the last verse would be the celestial spirit that descends on the Prophet and inspires the Qur'an to him.

The implied meaning—and God knows best—is: The spirit that descends to you and inspires the Qur'an to you belongs to Our command and is within Our power. And I swear that if We want We certainly take

1 2:188. (Auth.)

away this spirit, which is Our word that has been cast upon you, then you would not find anyone to be your guardian against Us, who would protect you, prosecute us and force Us to return what We have taken away from you.

This shows two points:

1. "That which We have revealed to you" refers to the divine spirit which is the same as the word that God has inspired to the Prophet as per the verse: *And thus did We reveal to you a spirit* (rūḥan) *of our command* (42:52).

2. What is meant by *wakīl* (guardian, protector) here is someone who would rise on the Prophet's behalf and demand back what God was taken away, as opposed to someone who would assist the Prophet in maintaining the Qur'an and reciting it. Some exegetes have favored the second view, which is based on interpreting *"that which We have revealed to you"* as the Qur'an, not as the descending spirit as we said in the previous point.[1]

إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّ فَضْلَهُ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ كَبِيرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

(17:87) ***But on account of mercy from your Lord—surely His grace to you is abundant.***

This exception is made to an omitted idea that is implied by the context. It is essentially saying: You have not been given and chosen by what you have been given and chosen—in terms of the descent of the spirit upon you and its company of you—but on account of mercy from your Lord. Then He has justified this mercy by saying: *surely His grace to you is abundant* (17:87), which is an expression of God's grace and favor.

قُلْ لَئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

(17:88) ***Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, though some***

1 In other words, the pronoun "it" in *"you would not find for it* (bihi)" refers to *"that which We have revealed to you."* Given the context of the verse, *"you would not find for it any protector against Us"* refers to protection against "taking away that which We have revealed to you," and "that which We have revealed to you" could be either the Qur'an or the spirit that has brought the Qur'an. (Trans.)

of them were aiders* (ẓahīran) *of others.

Ẓahīr means aider, helper, assistant. It is derived from *ẓahr* (lit. "back"), just like *raʾīs* (head, boss, manager) that is derived from *raʾs* (head). The repetition of "the like of" is an example of reiterating a noun instead of using a pronoun. The pronoun "it" refers to the Qur'an.[1]

This verse is a clear case of challenging (*taḥaddī*). It is also patent that the challenge pertains to all of the Qur'an's qualities of perfection, whether in terms of language or meaning, not just in terms of eloquence and rhetoric. This is because challenging to eloquence would not be applicable to non-Arabs, but the verse has included the gathering and cooperation of all men and jinn.

Furthermore, the verse clearly implies an ongoing challenge, while the leading figures of Arabic eloquence and rhetoric are extinct today and there is no sign of them anymore, yet the Qur'an remains as a miracle and continues to challenge others to bring the like of it as before.

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ فَأَبَىٰ أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٨٩﴾

(17:89) *And certainly We have explained* (ṣarrafnā, from taṣrīf) *for men in this Qur'an of* (min) *every kind of similitude* (mathal), *but most men* (al-nās) *do not consent to aught but ingratitude.*

Taṣrīf of similitudes means repeating and reiterating them in different words and ways. *Mathal* is a description of the intended meaning in a way that illustrates it and approximates it in the mind of the audience. The particle min (lit. "of" or "from") at the beginning of the phrase "of every kind of similitude" describes and identifies what has been explained in the Qur'an in different ways.[2] It means: We have explained for them every kind of similitude that clarifies for them the true path and the way of faith and gratitude. This is inferred by contrast from what is said next:

1 In other words, "the like of it" does not mean "the like of the like of the Qur'an," but it simply means "the like of the Qur'an." (Trans.)

2 This is called *min ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*, which marks the beginning of something and can best be translated as "from." It is not a discriminatory "of" (*min tabʿīḍiyyah*) which would mean "some similitudes" because that would contradict the usage of the word kull (every, all) in the verse. (Trans.)

but most men do not consent to aught but ingratitude (kufūran) (17:89).[1] The verse involves a sense of blame and rebuke.

The verse explicitly repeats the noun "men" where it says "but most men" while it could have referred to them by a pronoun: "but most of them." Perhaps this explicit mention is to indicate that this ingratitude is a result of them being *al-nās* (men, human beings), as per His words: *And man* (al-insān) *is ever ungrateful* (17:67).

The implied meaning is: I swear that in this Qur'an We have repeatedly mentioned every kind of explanation and description that would clarify to them the truth, and would call them to belief and thankfulness toward Our blessings, but most people do not consent except to deny and not thank.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا ﴿٩٠﴾ أَوْ تَكُونَ
لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِنْ نَخِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجِّرَ الْأَنْهَارَ خِلَالَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٩١﴾ أَوْ تُسْقِطَ
السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسَفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قَبِيلًا ﴿٩٢﴾ أَوْ
يَكُونَ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِنْ زُخْرُفٍ أَوْ تَرْقَىٰ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّىٰ
تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا نَقْرَؤُهُ ۗ قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّي هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٣﴾

(17:90-93) ***And they say: We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain*** **(yanbūʿan)** ***to gush forth*** **(tafjura, from fajr)** ***from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which*** **(khilālahā)** ***you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces*** **(kisafan)** ***as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us)*** **(qabīlan).** ***Or you should have a house of gold*** **(zukhruf),** ***or you should ascend*** **(tarqā, from ruqiyy)** ***into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending*** **(li-ruqiyyika)** ***until you bring down to us a book which we may read. Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger?***

Fajr means opening and split. *Tafjīr* has the same meaning, but it is

1 *Kufūr*, from *kufr*, can be either the opposite of belief (that is, disbelief, denial) or the opposite of gratitude (that is, ingratitude). The author has taken in both possibilities. The Qur'anic usages of *kafūr* comply more with the second meaning. (Trans.)

more exaggerated in quality and quantity. *Yanbūʿ* is a spring that is never dried. *Khilāl* means in the middle, between. *Kisaf* is the plural of *kisfah*, like *qiṭaʿ* which is the plural of *qiṭʿah*, both in terms of form and meaning (that is, piece, part). *Qabīlan* means *muqābil* (in front, face to face) like *ʿashīr* which means *muʿāshir* (associate, companion). *Zukhruf* means gold. *Ruqiyy* means ascension and rise.

These verses describe the requested miracles of Quraysh from the Prophet as a condition for their belief. These requests show their derogation of the Qur'an which is an eternal miracle.

The meaning is: *"And they"*: that is, Quraysh, *"say: We will by no means believe in you"* O Muḥammad, *"until you cause a fountain"* whose water does not dry *"to gush forth"* and split *"from the earth for us"*: that is, from the land of Mecca which is very dry (17:90). *"Or you should have"* through a miracle *"a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which"*: in the middle of that garden, *"you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out"*: that is, cause the rivers to split open or make it flow (17:91). *"Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think"*: a portion of the heaven, just as you have claimed. This refers to His words: *Or bring down upon them a portion from the heaven* (34:9).[1] *"Or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us)"*: right in front of us so that we can see and observe them (17:92). *"Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend"* and rise *"to heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending"* and your rise *"until you bring down to us"* from there *"a book which we may read"* and recite (17:93).

***…Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger* (basharan rasūlan)?** Here God commands the Prophet to respond to their requests by informing them of their ignorance and defiance that are not hidden from any intelligent observer. Most of their tremendous requests of the Prophet are acts that cannot be executed except by a divine supernatural force, and some of them are essentially impossible, such as bringing God and the angels to them face to face. Moreover, they assumed the Prophet to be the one who is in charge of these acts and responsible for answering their requests, because they did not say: We will by no means believe in you until you ask your Lord to do such-and-such, but they always attributed the acts to him: *"until you cause a fountain," "Or*

1 Therefore, this verse implicitly suggests that Chapter 34 (Saba') was revealed chronologically before Chapter 17 (al-Isrā'). (Auth.)

you should have," "Or you should cause the heaven to come down," "Or you should bring Allah and the angels face to face," "Or you should have a house of gold," "Or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read."

If they requested these things from him as a human being, then is there any human being who has such unlimited power and omnipotence that would even embrace actions that are essentially impossible? And if they requested these things from him on the grounds that he has claimed messengership, then messengership only means carrying God's command and conveying His warnings and glad tidings. Otherwise, messengership does not necessitate the entrustment and delegation of divine authority and supernatural forces to the messenger so that he can create whatever he wishes and brings about anything that he wants. The Prophet himself did not claim such a position. Given the clarity of this matter it is very strange that they made such a request to begin with.

That is why God has ordered His Prophet to start his reply by first glorifying his Lord of the entrustment and delegation of His power to the Prophet, which is implied by their requests. It could also be that *"Glory be to my Lord"* is said as a sign of surprise, because this sense and usage of glorification also fits the current context.

The Prophet is ordered to then ask them rhetorically: *Am I aught but a mortal messenger?* (17:93). This confirms the previous statement of *"Glory be to my Lord"* as a sign of surprise. It means: If you have requested these things from me and want me to do them for you, then I as Muḥammad am only a mortal, and no mortal is able to do these tasks. And if you have requested me to them because I am a messenger—or because I am claiming to be a messenger—then the role of a messenger is only to carrying and conveying the message, not carrying the absolute supernatural power [of God].

Based on the above, both qualities of being a "mortal" and being a "messenger" build toward the answer to their requests. Being a mortal refutes their expectation of him doing these acts out of his own power, and being a messenger rejects their expectation of him doing these tasks with an acquired power from his Lord.

Here is a summary of what one of the exegetes has said:

> The main argument is: "Am I aught but a messenger?" But since they denied the possibility of mortals [that is human beings] becoming messengers, the word *bashar* (mortal, human) is added

> as preparation to refute this view. This is evidenced by the messengership of the previous messengers, because they were also mortals. Therefore the meaning is: I am but a messenger just like the rest of the messengers who did not perform any miracles except for what God performed at their hands without any entrustment or delegation, and without them having any claim against their Lord?
>
> Including "mortal" and "messenger" jointly as part of the argument contravenes the narrations, because it has been narrated that they [the polytheists] asked the Prophet to ask his Lord to do such-and-such. They did not ask him to do these things of his own so that it would be rejected by pointing to his mortality. Moreover, if they are both part of the answer, then "messenger" would be a second predicate after "mortal" for the verb "am," and having two consecutive predicates is against fluency of language.

There are a few problems with the above interpretation:

1. There is no evidence for "mortal" being a refutation of their view that mortals cannot be messengers. There is no explicit or implicit mention of this view in the verses above. Therefore this is an unsupported interpretation.

2. The suggested meaning that "I am but a messenger just like the rest of the messengers who did not perform…" implies that the main argument is "being similar to the other messengers," which is different from the initial claim that "being a messenger" is the main argument. Also, it means that the main point of the verse's argument—that is, "Similarity to the other messengers"—has been omitted, which ruins the flow of the verse. Contemplate this.

3. The claimed narrations about them [the polytheists] asking the Prophet to request from his Lord to do these miracles as opposed to them asking the Prophet to do them directly himself by no means can stand the explicit text of the Qur'an which says the opposite. God is explicitly quoting from them: *"And they say: We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain… in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth… Or you should cause the heaven to come down…"* This is indeed a strange fallacy with regard to narrations, because they are being given priority and authority over the Book of God notwithstanding their contradiction with it.

4. The exegete has not provided any reason for why having two

consecutive predicates is against fluency of language.

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٤﴾

(17:94) ***And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?***

The question *"What! has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?"* is a rhetorical one that implies a negation and denial. This is a description of their belief, not that they necessarily spoke these exact words verbally.

Denying messengership while accepting God was characteristic of the polytheists. This shows that "people" in this verse means the polytheists, and "believing" means believing in God's messengers.

The implied meaning is: What prevented the polytheists—which at the time included Quraysh and the majority of Arabs—from believing in messengership—or in your messengership [O Muḥammad]—was their denial of human messengers [that is, the messengership of human beings]. That is why they have ever rejected the calls of their messengers, as God has narrated from them: *They said: If our Lord had pleased He would certainly have sent down angels, so we are surely unbelievers in that with which you are sent* (41:14).

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٥﴾

(17:95) ***Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a messenger.***

This is a refutation of their claim that humans cannot be messengers and cannot receive revelation. God orders His Messenger to answer them by saying that the divine will has decreed to guide the people of the earth, and this guidance does not emerge from themselves but must be revealed from the heaven.[1] Thus, the human beings living on earth are in need of

1 Clearly what is meant by "heaven" in this verse and these discussions is the

a heavenly revelation that is brought down to them by a messenger angel, which should be received by a human prophet among them in particular.

This is a special characteristic of life "on the earth," that is, material life. Such life is in need of divine guidance that is not accessible except by revelation from the heavens, such that even if there were angels residing in the earth and living a material life, then We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel messenger, just as We have now sent an angel messenger to mankind.

As you can see the verse revolves around two central points:

1. life on earth is a material life; and

2. the guidance that God's grace necessitates occurs through sending down revelation by the messengership of an angel. This is indeed the case, and these two facts are two essential premises in proving the truth and necessity of messengership.

The exegetes have insistently narrowed the meaning of the verse to the idea that a messenger must be of the same species as the target audience and should be one of them, like a human messenger for humans and an angel messenger for angels. This, however, is not such a fundamental aspect of messengership [relative to the two mentioned above] and that is why it is not explicitly mentioned in this noble verse.

This is because having a messenger from among themselves that educates and trains the people is also due to their life being an earthly and material one. Similarly, the very fact that there must be a human messenger for human beings is also due to the fact that revelation is brought down by a heavenly angel toward an earthly audience. What is special about material beings is that they necessarily differ from one another in terms of felicity and wretchedness, perfection and imperfection, and spiritual purity and impurity. As a result, only a human being who is pure and perfect can receive revelation from a heavenly angel: *None shall touch it save the purified ones* (56:79). Therefore, even though angels descend on humankind as a species, the individual human beings that can touch base with them are only those persons that are pure from material defilements and impurities, and whom the devils cannot touch. These individuals are the human messengers.

Further explanation: The divine grace necessitates guiding every

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immaterial realm, as opposed to "earth" which signifies the world of nature, matter and time. (Trans.)

species to its perfection and felicity, and mankind is no exception to this universal rule. Mankind's happiness is not achieved except by living a social life governed by laws and customs that ensure their happiness in this life and afterlife and settles the disagreements that necessarily arise between them. Now, since man is an intelligent being, he needs a means or faculty to receive these laws and customs. The human intellect that distinguishes between good and bad is not sufficient in this regard because the human intellect is the very cause of these differences and disagreements. Hence, there is no resolution for mankind [as a species, not as individuals] to have another form of intelligence by which they can receive what God bestows in terms of teachings and laws that remove their differences and ensure their perfection and happiness. This kind of intelligence (*shuʿūr*) is called revelation (*waḥy*) and the human being who possesses it is called a prophet.

This is a sound rational argument deduced from God's Book. We discussed and elaborated it in our discussion about prophethood in vol. 2 [vol. 3 of the Eng. translation], and in our discussion of Noah's story in vol. 10 [vol. 20 of the Eng. translation].

Our current verse of discussion—*Say: Had there been in the earth angels…* (17:95)—adds to the above argument by saying that revelation to mankind must be through the descension of an angel from the heaven.

This is because this verse and the previous one essentially say that what prevents people from believing your messengership is that they deem it impossible for a human being to be God's messenger. However, they are wrong in this because earthly life and God's graceful care for the guidance of His servants necessitate that He sends an angel messenger from heaven to some of them, such that even if there were angels living in the earth like mankind then God would have again sent a messenger to them from the heaven to carry His revelation.

Based on the above we can deduce the following points:

1. The meaning of a human messenger: It is a person to whom an angel descends from the heaven with God's religion, and who then conveys it to the people by God's command.

2. The proof for messengership: The earthly life of mankind and God's care for the guidance of His servants to reach their perfection require the descent of a religion to them from the heaven. In this process the angels are the instruments of bringing down heavenly blessings on earth. Thus religion necessarily descends upon mankind by means of an angel, and

this is the messengership of angels. Then, the person who sees this angel and receives what it has brought would be the human messenger—and that cannot be all of the people because it requires inner purity and a spirit that is of God's command.

The previous verse said: *"What! has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?"* (17:94). It might have been more congruent with this phrase and wording to say here, "God would have certainly raised among them (*fihim*) an angel as a messenger." However, it says instead: *"We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a messenger"* (17:95). This expression is because of two reasons. First, it more decisively cuts through their doubt and misconception, because idolaters in general—including Hindus, Buddhists and Sabeans, as their scriptures testify—do not have much problem with the idea of a perfect man rising among mankind to bring them to perfection, called a savior or reformer. They are also fine with the descent of God to the earth and His appearance to mankind in the form of an earthly being, as they claim to have been the case of Buddha and Yudasif (Yudasp). Either way, they worship an angel, a jinn or a human being that is immersed in the divine, but not God.

However, they see it absolutely impossible for an angel to be sent as a messenger to mankind, and who brings a religion that calls to the worship of God alone. Angels are among their worshipped gods while God is not worshipped by them. Hence, the verse directly opposes their view by explicitly referring to the dispatch of a heavenly angel from God toward earthly human beings.

Second, the expression indicates that the angel is in fact sent to all human beings, except that only one of them—the human messenger—is fit for receiving revelation from it. As with the rest of mankind, they are deprived from this direct reception due to their lack of capacity and aptitude for it. Hence, this [that is, the descent of an angel with religion] is a universal grace for everyone, although it has particular recipients. He says: *And the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20), and: *Allah best knows where He places His message* (6:124).

The meaning of *risālah* (messengership) inferred from this verse confirms what has been narrated from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt about the difference between a *rasūl* (apostle, messenger) and a *nabī* (prophet): A *rasūl* is one who sees the angel of revelation and hears its voice, while a *nabī* is one who only sees dreams but does not see the angel in wakefulness. We quoted some of these narrations in our discussion on prophethood

in vol. 2 [vol. 3 of the Eng. translation].

A very succinct and remarkably subtle expression in this verse is referring to earthly life as: *in the earth angels walking about as settlers* (17:95), because walking physically on the earth while being subject to gravity is one of the special characteristics of material life on the earth.[1]

This verse and the last two all end with the world *rasūlan* (messenger). This is the only case in the Qur'an—as I remember—where three consecutive verses have the same ending.[2]

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٩٦﴾

(17:96) ***Say: Allah suffices as a witness between me and you; surely He is Aware of His servants, Seeing.***

The previous verses provided arguments and clarified the matter for the polytheists about the miracle of the Prophet's messengership which is the Qur'an, by which they have been challenged. Yet, they continued their defiance, denial, disregard, request for other baseless miracles, disrespect for the truth, and persistence on falsehood. Thus, here the Prophet is ordered to refer the matter to God's witness, Who was witness over what went on between him and them. The Prophet conveyed what he was sent with, called, argued, and did not leave them any excuse. They, on the other hand, heard the message and God's proof was completed against them, yet they rebelled defiantly. Therefore, this verse serves as a declaration of end of debate, stop of argument, and deferral of the case to the real Holder of command so that He may judge however He shall judge.

It has been suggested that the verse draws on God's witness and testimony about the truth of the call and the authenticity of the Prophet's messengership. So the verse is effectively saying: It is sufficient proof for me that God testifies to my messengership, for here is His Book saying so. If you say, "This is not His Book but you have fabricated it," then bring something like it—but you will never be able to bring the like of it even if men and jinn help and assist you in it.

This aspect of God's witness is true in its own right, but, as others have

1 The idea of gravity is deduced from the word *muṭmaʾinnīn* (as settlers, securely, at peace). (Trans.)

2 Another similar example is verses 40:64-66, where three consecutive verses end with *Rabb al-ʿālamīn* (the Lord of the worlds). (Trans.)

also noted, it does not comply with what follows next in the verse: *"between me and you,"* and: *"surely He is Aware of His servants, Seeing"* (17:96). If the above was the intended meaning it should have said, "a witness for me against you" or "a witness over my messengership," or something like that.

وَ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَ مَنْ يُضْلِلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ أَوْلِياءَ مِنْ دُونِهِ

(17:97) ***And whomsoever Allah guides, he is the follower of the right way, and whomsoever He causes to err, you shall not find for him guardians besides Him;***

Given the context, this is a continuation of the last verse's address to the Prophet: *Say: Allah suffices as a witness between me and you…* (17:96). It is a way of saying that the proof and argument has been completed against them. Their misguidance has become due, and there is no hope in their guidance any more.

The verse is essentially saying: Declare the end of argument with them, because indeed guidance is from God alone and no one has a say in it besides Him. The followers of the right way are those whom God guides, not anyone else. And if He misleads anyone—that is, does not guide him—then you O Muḥammad shall not find any other guardian that would guide him. And God does not guide these people [that is, Quraysh, and/or the polytheists], so cut off from them and do not impose on yourself to call them any further hoping that they may believe.

This shows that what some exegetes have said—that this verse is a new thread, not something that falls under "Say" in the previous verse—is not true.

It would have been more emphasized if the verse had said "guardian" (*walī*) in singular form,[1] but it said "guardians" (*awliyāʾ*) in plural because if such people were to have any guardians besides God, it would have been either their gods—which are many—or other material means and instruments—which are also many.

And whomsoever Allah guides, he is the follower of the right way…: The address and tone in the previous verses was that of majestic plural but here it switches to the third person singular. Perhaps the reason for this

1 "No guardian" is a more emphasized negation than "no guardians" because the former negates both plural and singular while the latter does not contradict the existence of one guardian. (Trans.)

is that if it were to say, "Whomsoever We guide… and whomsoever We cause to err" it would have suggested that the angels also have a share in guidance and misguidance, which would have contradicted what is said next: *You shall not find for him guardians besides Him* (17:97). After all, the angels were considered guardians by the polytheists, and they used to worship them as gods.

وَ نَحْشُرُهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيامَةِ عَلى وُجُوهِهِمْ عُمْياً وَ بُكْماً وَ صُمًّا مَأْواهُمْ
جَهَنَّمُ كُلَّما خَبَتْ زِدْناهُمْ سَعِيراً ﴿٩٧﴾ ذٰلِكَ جَزاؤُهُمْ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا
بِآيَاتِنَا وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرُفَاتًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٩٨﴾

(17:97-98) ***…and We will gather them together on the day of resurrection on their faces, blind* (ʿumyan) *and dumb* (bukman) *and deaf* (ṣumman)*; their abode is hell; whenever it becomes allayed* (khabat, from khabw) *We will add to their burning* (saʿīran). *This is their retribution because they disbelieved in Our communications and said, What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then indeed be raised up into a new creation?***

ʿUmy, *bukm* and *ṣumm* are the plurals of *aʿmā* (blind), *abkam* (dumb) and aṣamm *(deaf)* respectively. The *khabw* of fire is when its flames settle and subside. *Saʿīr* means the flames of fire. *This is their retribution because they disbelieved in Our communications and said, What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then indeed be raised up into a new creation?* The meaning is clear.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِى خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ قَادِرٌ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ
مِثْلَهُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَهُمْ أَجَلًا لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَأَبَى الظَّالِمُونَ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٩٩﴾

(17:99) ***Do they not consider that Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, is able to create their like, and He has appointed for them a doom about which there is no doubt? But the unjust do not consent to aught but ingratitude* (kufūran).**

Kufūr means *juḥūd* (denial, rejection). This is an argument by Him for resurrection after death. Their argument was: *What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then indeed be raised up into*

a new creation? (17:98) They viewed resurrection unlikely because they believed that it is impossible for this material body to be turned into a new creation after it has disintegrated and turned into bones and decayed particles. In response, God says that the creation of body in the first place proves God's power to do this an act and other similar acts—such as a new creation for resurrection. The same rule applies to similars.

"Similarity" is only the case when the new body is compared to the first one, irrespective of the soul that maintains the oneness and individuation of the person. This does not mean that the otherworldly person is merely similar to the worldly person and not identical to him, because what determines sameness and individuality is the human soul [not the body], and the soul is preserved with God without annulment or annihilation. When this same soul is attached to a new creation, the person would be the exact same one as in this world, just like the case in this world where the person's identity and individual oneness is maintained even though his entire body is ever changing.

The following verses are evidence to the fact that the soul, which is the reality of mankind, is preserved with God even when the person's body disintegrates and his material form disappears: *And they say: What! when we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation? Nay! they are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord. Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you will take your soul in full* (32:10-11). Here, they argue against return to life by saying that it would be a restoration of creation after the person has disappeared by the disintegration of his body parts. Then they are told in response that the Angel of Death fully takes and completely captures the person, so he is neither lost nor decays. What is lost is only his body, and there is no problem with that because God will recreate it.

The claim that the person who is resurrected is exactly the same as the person in this world—and not the like or similar of it—is based on all of the verses about hereafter that talk about the return of mankind to God, resurrection, questioning, reckoning and retribution for actions.

These points show that "their like" in this verse [17:99] only pertains to the body, as we interpreted above. The answer given in this verse based on the likeness of the two bodies corresponds to their argument which was only about the body, not the soul that is fully captured: *What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then indeed be raised up into a new creation?* (17:98) The two bodies irrespective of the

soul would be likes, but with respect to the soul they would be identical.

Some exegetes have said that "like" here means "same." For example it is said, "Someone like you should not do this," which means, "You should not do this." But this is open to question because apparently what is meant in this example is that someone like you should not do this because of the attributes that you have. Thus you should not do it either because you have the same attributes. Therefore, this expression is a way of negating an act indirectly based on negating the attributes that lead to that act. It is a stronger statement than simply saying, "You should not do this."

…and He has appointed for them a doom (ajalan) about which there is no doubt…: Apparently *ajal* here means the time of death. *Ajal* either refers to one's entire lifespan in the world, which is limited by death, or the end of one's life just before death. Either way, reminding them of death, about which there is no doubt, is so that they take a lesson and stop defying God and denying His communications, because He is able to resurrect them and requite them for what they have done.

Therefore, this statement refers to what He said at the beginning of the last verse: *This is their retribution because they disbelieved in Our communications* (17:98), and it is similar to the following verses: *And (as to) those who reject Our communications, We draw them near (to destruction) by degrees from whence they know not… Do they not consider the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever things Allah has created, and that may be their doom shall have drawn nigh; what announcement would they then believe in after this?* (7:182-185).

Some exegetes have said that "the appointed time" (*ajal*) here could be the Day of Resurrection. However, this does not match the context because the previous verse talked about their denial of resurrection and then it argued against them by referring to God's power. Therefore it does not make sense to talk about the resurrection as something that is certain, "about which there is no doubt."

Others have said that this statement—*and He has appointed for them a doom about which there is no doubt*—is another argument to prove the Day of Resurrection. However, whether we interpret *ajal* as the day of death or the Day of Resurrection it would not make a clear argument for the resurrection. Therefore there is no need to pursue this any further.

قُلْ لَوْ أَنْتُمْ تَمْلِكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي إِذًا لَأَمْسَكْتُمْ خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ ۚ

وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ قَتُورًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

(17:100) ***Say: If you control the treasures of the mercy of my Lord, then you would withhold (them) from fear of spending, and man is niggardly*** **(qatūran).**

Qatūr has been interpreted as one who is stingy to the utmost degree. *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says:

> *Qatr* means *taḍyīq* (tighten, restrict). It is used when one restrains and withholds in spending. *Qatūr* is an exaggerated form of this root.

This verse censures them for what prevents them from believing in human messengers, as it was narrated from them above: *And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?* (17:94). The meaning of the verse is clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Indeed cure is only to be found in the knowledge of Qur'an, for He says: *That which is a healing* (shifāʾ) *and a mercy to the believers* (17:82)…[1]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "Intention is better than action. Rather, intention is indeed the very action." Then he recited His words: *Say: Every one acts according to his character* (17:84) and said, "Or means according to his intention."[2]

Author's comment: His statement that "Intention is indeed the very action" refers to their union as title and that which is titled.[3]

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "The people of Fire stay there forever because their intention in this world was that if they were to live there forever they would disobey God forever. The people of Paradise stay there forever because their intention in this world was that

1 *Tafsīr al-ᶜAyyāshī*, on the authority of Masᶜadat b. Ṣadaqa.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Sufyān b. ᶜUyaynah.

3 In other words, we have a distinct title for "intention" but in reality it is action. It is an action of the heart, and since outward actions are a result of one's intention, intention is the action. (Trans.)

if they were to live there forever they would obey God forever. Therefore, it is by their intentions that both groups remain where they are forever." Then He recited His words: *Say: Every one acts according to his character* (17:84) and said: "That is, according to his intention."[1]

Author's comment: This refers to the rooting of traits and the strengthening of characteristics in the soul to the point that the soul's capacity for opposite traits is abolished. Al-ʿAyyāshī has also narrated this hadith in his *Tafsīr*, on the authority of Abū Hāshim, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

(4) Concerning verse 17:85 (*And they ask you about the spirit…*) it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās said: Quraysh asked the Jews, "Give us something that we can ask this man." They told them, "Ask him about the spirit (*al-rūḥ*)." So they asked him about it and it was revealed: *And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little* (17:85). The Jews then said, "We have been given great knowledge. We have been given the Torah, and whoever is given the Torah is indeed given great good." So God revealed: *Say: If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted, though We were to bring the like of that (sea) to add* (18:109).[2]

Author's comment: It has been narrated through other chains of transmission, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Masʿūd and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Umm al-Ḥakam: "This question was raised by the Jews in Medina, and that is where the verse was revealed." However, this does not comply with the chapter being a Meccan one and the contextual uniformity of its verses.

(5) Concerning verse 17:85 (*And they ask you about the spirit…*) it is narrated from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: This is one of the angels that has seventy thousand faces; each face has seventy thousand tongues; each tongue speaks seventy thousand words. He glorifies God by all of these words, God creates an angel from each glorification,

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Hāshim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī—who has authenticated it, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Ḥibbān, Abū al-Shaykh in *al-ʿAẓamah*, al-Ḥākim—who has authenticated it, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī—both in *al-Dalāʾil*.

and he flies with the angels until the Day of Resurrection.[1]

Author's comment: The spirit being one of the angels does not match several verses in the Qur'an such as: *He sends down the angels with the spirit by His commandment* (16:2). Under verse 16:2 we quoted a hadith from ʿAlī where he denies the spirit being an angel and quotes the verse as evidence. Therefore the matter of spirit should be taken from the following narrations:

(6) Abū Baṣīr said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words: *And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord* (17:85). He said: "This is a creature that is greater than Gabriel and Michael. It was with the Messenger of God and then with the Imams. It is from *malakūt* (the realm of dominion, the angelic world)."[2]

Author's comment: There are also other narrations to this effect. This narration confirms our exposition about what is inferred from the verses of the Qur'an.

(7) Concerning verse 17:85 (*And they ask you about the spirit*) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: Surely God is *Aḥad* (One) and *Ṣamad*—and *ṣamad* is that which has no *jawf* (belly, cavity, hollow). Indeed the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) is one of His creatures that has sight, power and support. God places it in the hearts of the messengers and believers.[3]

Author's comment: The first part of the narration intends to refute a possible misconception that God has a body and breath based on certain expressions like His words: *And breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29).

(8) Abū Baṣīr has narrated from one of the two Imams [al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq]: I asked him about His words: *And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is of the command of my Lord* (17:85), "What is the spirit?" He said, "It is that which is in the animals and men." I asked, "And what is that?" He said, "It is from *malakūt*,

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Anbāzī in *al-Aḍdād*, Abū al-Shaykh in al-ʿAẓamah, al-Bayhaqī in *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, with its chain of narration.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah and Ḥumrān.

from [God's] power."[1]

Author's comment: These narrations confirm what we said above—that the spirit that is questioned about has an expansive reality with various grades. The last narration shows that apparently the animal soul is also something immaterial, from the divine realm.

(9) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The following individuals once gathered after sunset behind the Kaʿbah: ʿUtbah and Shaybah sons of Rabīʿah, Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, a man from Banī ʿAbd al-Dār, Abū al-Bakhtarī from Banī Asad, al-Aswad b. al-Muṭṭalib, Zamʿah [Rabīʿah] b. al-Aswad, al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah, Abū Jahl b. Hishām, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Umayyah, Umayyah b. Khalaf, al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil, and Nabīh and Munabbih[2] sons of al-Ḥajjāj al-Sahmī. They told one another, "Send someone to Muḥammad to talk to him and argue against him so that he may have no more excuse against you."

They sent a message to him saying, "Indeed the heads of your tribe have gathered to talk to you." The Messenger of God hastened toward them as he thought that perhaps they have changed their mind, for he was very eager toward them, he wanted their rectitude, and their misguidance was grievous to him. He came and sat with them.

They said, "O Muḥammad! We have called you in order to leave no more excuse for you. By God we do not know any man from Arab having done to his tribe what you have done to yours. You have indeed cursed our fathers, disapproved our religion, accused our wits of folly, cursed our gods and divided our community. There is no evil that you have not done to us. If you have come up with this in order to acquire wealth, then we will raise money for you and make you the wealthiest among us. If you want mastery over us, then we will make you our master. If you want kingdom, then we will make you a king over us. If you do what you do because of a jinn that you see and overcomes you, then perhaps we can spend our wealth trying to find a cure for you so that you may be freed from this jinn, and thus leave you no more excuse."

The Messenger of God replied, "What you said does not apply

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 These two names have also been recorded as Munyah and Bunyah, respectively. See *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 1:257 and 1:269. (Trans.)

to me. I have not come to you with what I have come seeking your possessions, wealth or kingdom. God has aroused me as a messenger toward you, has descended a book on me, and has commanded me to bring you warnings and glad tidings. I have conveyed the message of my Lord to you and have given you sincere admonition. Now, if you accept what I have brought for you then that will be your gain in this world and the hereafter, and if you return it back to me then I will wait for God's command, until God judges between me and you."

They said, "O Muḥammad! If you do not accept what we offered you, then you know that there is no people whose land is as constricted, that are poorer, and that live in more difficult conditions than us. So ask your Lord—that has sent you with what He has sent you—to move these mountains that have constricted us away from us, expand our town, flow rivers in it like the rivers in Syria and Iraq, and raise our fathers back to life. Among those who He resurrects there must be Quṣayy b. Kilāb, for he was a truthful old man and we can ask him whether what you are saying is true or false. If you do what we ask you and he confirms what you say, then we will confirm you as well. We will then recognize your position with God and accept that He has sent you as a messenger."

The Messenger of God said, "I have not been sent to do such things. I have come to you from God only by that which He has sent me, and I have conveyed to you what I have been sent with. Now, if you accept what I have brought for you then that will be your gain in this world and the hereafter, and if you return it back to me then I will wait for God's command, until God judges between me and you."

They said, "If you do not do that for us, then choose one of the following for yourself if you are really a messenger as you claim: Ask your Lord to send an angel to confirm what you are saying and turn us away from you. Or ask Him to give you gardens, treasures and palaces of gold and silver that would make you solvent of your current condition that we see, because you go to the market and seek your livelihood just like us. Then we would know your position with your Lord."

The Messenger of God said, "I am not the person who does so.

I am not a person who would ask his Lord these things. I have not been sent to you for these matters, but God has sent me as a bearer of glad tiding and warning. Now, if you accept what I have brought for you then that will be your gain in this world and the hereafter, and if you return it back to me then I will wait for God's command, until God judges between me and you."

They said, "Then cause the heaven to come down upon us, just as you say that your Lord would do if He wills, because we will never believe in you unless you do this." The Messenger of God said, "That is up to God to do this to you if He wills."

They said, "O Muḥammad! [If you are truly God's messenger] your Lord would have known that we will sit with you, ask you about what we asked, and request from you what we requested. So He would have sent to you and taught you what would turn us away from you beforehand. He would have informed you of what He shall do to us if we do not accept what you have brought to us. Indeed we have been told that there is this man in Yamāmah named al-Raḥmān who teaches you, but by God we will never ever believe in al-Raḥmān. We have left you no excuse, O Muḥammad. By God we will not let you go away with what you have done to us unless either we or you are destroyed." One of them added, "We will never believe in you unless you bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us) (17:92)."

When they said this the Messenger of God got up to leave. Then ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Umayyah also got up and said, "O Muḥammad! Your people offered you what they offered, but you did not accept it from them. Then they asked you certain things by which they may know your position with God, but you did not do it for them. Then they asked you to bring about the punishment by which you threaten them. By God I will never believe in you unless you take a ladder and ascend to the heaven in front of my eyes, then you come down and bring with you a book that is wide open, along with four angels that would testify that you are what you claim to be. By God even if you do this I do not think I would believe in you."

Then he left the Messenger of God and the Messenger of God went back to his family in sorrow. Their defiance disappointed him of the hope that he had in them when they had called him.

About what ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Umayyah had told him these verses were revealed: *And they say: We will by no means believe in you… a mortal messenger?* (17:90-93)…[1]

Author's comment: The conversations, questions and answers in this narration do not match the apparent sense of the verses and the answers that are deduced from the verses, as we discussed above in our exposition.

It has been narrated through several Shia and Sunni chains that their representative who said these things to the Prophet was ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Umayyah al-Makhzūmī, the brother of Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife.

(10) Concerning verse 17:97 (*We will gather them together on the day of resurrection on their faces*) it is narrated from Anas: Once someone asked, "O Messenger of God, how will the people be resurrected on their faces?" He said, "The one who has made them walk on their feet can make them walk on their faces."[2]

Author's comment: There are also other narrations to this effect

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥakim, Abū Nuʿaym in al-Maʿrifah, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*.

Verses 101-111

These verses compare the Qur'an as the Prophet's miracle, the polytheist's aversion to it, and their request for other unreasonable signs to the signs of prophethood that Moses brought, Pharaoh's aversion to them, and his accusation of Moses as one who is bewitched. Then again the verses talk about the Qur'an, why it was revealed in pieces, and some other points with regard to the Book.

Commentary

وَ لَقَدْ آتَيْنا مُوسى تِسْعَ آياتٍ بَيِّناتٍ فَسْئَلْ بَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ إِذْ جاءَهُمْ فَقالَ لَهُ فِرْعَوْنُ إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يا مُوسى مَسْحُوراً ﴿١٠١﴾

(17:101) ***And certainly We gave Moses nine clear signs; so ask the children of Israel. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: Most surely I deem you, O Moses, to be a man bewitched.***

The signs that Moses was given and are discussed in the Qur'an were more than nine, but nine of them that are mentioned in the Qur'an were part of his message to Pharaoh. They were: the cane, the hand, the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, the blood, the droughts, and diminution of fruits. Apparently these are the nine signs mentioned in this verse, especially given what Moses tells Pharaoh in the next verse: *"Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these as clear proof"* (17:102). The verse does not include the other signs and miracles such as the splitting of the sea, the splitting of the rock, bringing the murdered person back to life by means of a cow, bringing back to life those of his people who had been overtaken by the quake, and elevating the mountain above them.

This does not contradict the gradual appearance of these signs, because what is meant in this verse is an overview of the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh throughout his mission. Therefore one should disregard the view of some exegetes who have interpreted these signs differently, claiming that there is no evidence for the interpretation that we provided above.

In the Torah the nine signs are: the cane, the blood, the frogs, the lice, the death of animals, a cold that killed every plant and animal that it stroke like fire, the locusts, the darkness, and the death of all first-borns of mankind and the first-borns of all animals.

Perhaps it is because of this discrepancy between the Qur'an and the Torah that the verse has not identified these nine signs in detail, so that it would command the Prophet to "ask the children of Israel" (17:101). Otherwise, the Jews would not have confirmed the Qur'an if it were to oppose their Book, but they would have denied and rejected God's Book.

***…Most surely I deem you, O Moses, to be a man bewitched* (masḥūran):** That is: You have been bewitched and thus you are out of your mind. This is similar to another statement narrated from him [Pharaoh] elsewhere in the Qur'an: *Most surely your messenger who is sent to you is mad* (26:27). Some have said that *masḥūr* here (lit. "bewitched") means *sāḥir* (sorcerer, wizard), like *maymūn* and *mashʾūm* that mean *yāmin* and *shāʾim* (auspicious and inauspicious, respectively), where what is originally meant by these terms is the root meaning in the form *fāʿil* (subject) [although it is mentioned in the form *mafʿūl*: object]. The meaning of the verse is clear.

قالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ ما أَنْزَلَ هؤُلاءِ إِلاَّ رَبُّ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ بَصائِرَ وَ إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُوراً ﴿١٠٢﴾

(17:102) *He said: Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these as clear proof and most surely I believe you* (la-aẓunnuka, from ẓann), *O Pharaoh, to be given over to perdition* (mathbūran).

Mathbūr means *hālik* (destroyed, lost). It is derived from *thubūr*, meaning *halāk* (death, loss). The implied meaning is: Moses told Pharaoh: You know, O Pharaoh, that these clear signs have not been sent by anyone except the Lord of the heavens and the earth. He has sent them as clear proof by which people can see and distinguish truth from falsehood. But I believe, O Pharaoh, that you will end up being destroyed due to your denial and defiance.

There are a few possible explanations for why he used the word *ẓann* (suppose, guess, think): 1. because it is up to God to decide about one's predition; 2. in order to comply with and counter what Pharaoh said: *"I deem you* (la-aẓunnuka, from ẓanna), *O Moses"* (17:101); 3. *ẓann* is

sometimes used to mean certainty (*yaqīn*).[1]

فَأَرادَ أَنْ يَسْتَفِزَّهُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ فَأَغْرَقْناهُ وَ مَنْ مَعَهُ جَمِيعاً ﴿١٠٣﴾

(17:103) *So he desired to derive them* (yastafizzahum, from istifzāz) *out of the land, but We drowned him and those with him all together.*

Istifzāz means to push and derive away by force. The meaning of the verse is clear.

وَ قُلْنا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ اسْكُنُوا الْأَرْضَ فَإِذا جاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ جِئْنا بِكُمْ لَفِيفاً ﴿١٠٤﴾

(17:104) *And We said to the Israelites after him: Dwell in the land: and when* (fa-idhā) *the promise of the next life* (waʿd al-ākhirah) *shall come to pass, We will bring you all together* (lafifan) *[in judgment].*

"The land" in which they were ordered to dwell is the holy land that God wrote for them as per His words: *Enter the holy land which Allah has prescribed for you* (5:21), and so on. "The earth" in the previous verse [17:103] meant the earth in general, or the land of Egypt based on the context. *Waʿd al-ākhirah* means the promise of the second return or the second life, which means—according to the exegetes—the Day of Resurrection. *Lafīfan* means all gathered together and intertwined.

The implied meaning is: Once We drowned Pharaoh, We told the Children of Israel to settle in the holy land, whereas Pharaoh wanted to expel them from the earth. Then, when the Day of Resurrection comes, We will bring you all gathered in a place for judgment and settlement of disputes.

Although most exegetes have not talked about this possibility, it is quite likely that what is meant by *waʿd al-ākhirah* (lit. "the promise of the next"; that is, "the next promise") is what God mentioned at the beginning

1 The translation of the term as "believer" complies with this last meaning. Note that *la-aẓunnuka* involves a letter *lām* at the beginning and a stressed *nūn* at the end, both of which are used for emphasis. This also supports the view that *ẓanna* here means certainty and sure belief. (Trans.).

of the chapter about what He decreed for the Israelites: *So when the second promise* (waʿd al-ākhirah) *came that they may bring you to grief and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy whatever they gained ascendancy over with utter destruction* (17:7). This is a way of wrapping up the discussion as it connects the end of the chapter to its beginning. Then the implied meaning would be: Once We drowned Pharaoh, We commanded them to settle in the holy land and stay there until the second promise comes to you, whereby you will be intertwined by killing, captivation and exile. That is when We will gather you and bring you as an intertwined group—referring to their captivity and exile to Babylonia.

The letter *fāʾ* (lit. "then" or "so") in *fa-idhā* ("and when," "so when," "then when") indicates that what is said next is a consequence of what was said before (*tafrīʿ*). The usage of this letter here makes sense based on the second meaning [where *waʿd al-ākhirah* refers to verse 17:7] but not with the first [where *waʿd al-ākhirah* means the Day of Resurrection]. This is evident.

وَ بِالْحَقِّ أَنْزَلْناهُ وَ بِالْحَقِّ نَزَلَ وَ ما أَرْسَلْناكَ إِلاَّ مُبَشِّراً وَ نَذِيراً ﴿١٠٥﴾

(17:105) ***And with truth have We revealed it, and with truth did it come; and We have not sent you but as the giver of good news and as a warner.***

After finishing the above analogy [between the Prophets Muḥammad and Moses] this verse goes back to the previous discussion about the Qur'an and its attributes. It says here that He sent it down accompanied by the truth. Since it has come from Him accompanied by the truth, it is secure from all falsehood from the sender's side. Thus, it is not vain and futile talk; there is nothing in it that can corrupt it some day; and it has no co-authors who may abrogate it some time later on. Furthermore, the Prophet is but a messenger from Him that gives good news and warning by the means of the Qur'an. It is not up to him to manipulate the Book by addition or omission, and he cannot drop part or all of it due to the request of the people or his own desire. It is not up to him to let go of this Book and ask God for another sign that he or his people desire. It is not up to him to make a compromise with them about the Qur'an or exempt them from some of its laws and teachings. All of these are because it is the word of truth that has emanated from a source of truth; *"And what is*

there after the truth but error?" (10:32).

Based on the above explanation, *"We have not sent you…"* is a continuation of the beginning of the verse. The verse is essentially saying that the Qur'an is a true sign and no one has the right to manipulate it in any way whatsoever, whether that is the Prophet or someone else

وَ قُرْآناً فَرَقْناهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلى مُكْثٍ وَ نَزَّلْناهُ تَنْزِيلاً ﴿١٠٦﴾

(17:106) ***And it is a Qur'an which We have revealed in portions* (faraqnāhu)** ***so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees* (mukthin)*, and We have revealed it, revealing in portions.***

The "and" at the beginning of this verse connects it to the previous verse. That is: We have revealed it by the truth and We have revealed it as a *Qur'an* (lit. "recitation") in portions.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Faraqnāhu* means *faṣṣalnāhu* ("We have differentiated it"). That is, We have revealed it verse by verse and chapter by chapter. This is confirmed by what is said next: "by slow degrees" (*ʿalā mukthin*). *Mukth* and *makth* have the same meaning (to pause, to tarry).

The verse by itself includes the idea that the original and transcendent form of Qur'anic teachings that are with God descend in the form of words and phrases that cannot be received by the people and imparted to them but gradually, slowly and piece-by-piece, so that they can easily understand and absorb it. This meaning would be similar to His words: *Surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you may understand. And surely it is in the original of the Book with Us, truly elevated, full of wisdom* (43:3-4).

The verses of the Qur'an are separated in portions and revealed verse by verse and chapter by chapter so that the people may gradually develop the capacity to absorb the root beliefs that they should believe in, and the practical branches that they should perform. This gradual descent of the teachings and rulings serves the purpose of keeping knowledge hand-in-hand with practice, and prevents the people's natures from being overdosed by the entire Book at once. The Torah was revealed in one shot but the Jews did not readily accept it—except after the mountain was raised over them like a covering.

However, given the context of the previous verses—such as what was narrated from the polytheists: *until you bring down to us a book which we may read* (17:93)—it is more appropriate to say that this verse relates to the

polytheists' request for the Qur'an to be sent down all at once. Therefore, what is meant by the differentiation of the Qur'an is the gradual and separated revelation of its verses and chapters according to the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). The people's request for the Qur'an to be brought in one piece is seen in a few places; for example: *And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'an been revealed to him all at once?* (25:32). Similarly, it is narrated from the People of the Book: *The followers of the Book ask you to bring down to them a book from heaven* (4:153).

The subsequent part of the verse confirms this: *and We have revealed it, revealing in portions* (nazzalnāhu tanzīlan) (17:105), because *tanzīl* means sending something down gradually. This complies more with the second aspect than the first.[1]

Yet, the second aspect implicates the first. The idea that the Qur'an is differentiated and separated in terms of being revealed in portions as opposed to being revealed all at once (the second aspect) necessitates that its many teachings and rulings are differentiated and separated after their initial inclusion in a single concentrated essence and one encompassing reality (the first aspect).

That is why God has differentiated His Book into chapters and verses after He dressed it in Arabic language so that the people may understand it: *that you may understand* (43:3). He ordered and sorted it into verses and chapters, and descended them one after another as they were needed, according to the people's various capacities and their readiness to receive each of these portions. This was done over the full twenty-three years [of the Prophet's mission] so that teaching may go hand-in-hand with training, and knowledge with practice.

We will return to a few other points concerning this verse and this chapter in a separate discussion later on, if God wills.

قُلْ آمِنُوا بِهِ أَوْ لا تُؤْمِنُوا إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ إِذا يُتْلى عَلَيْهِمْ يَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقانِ سُجَّداً ﴿١٠٧﴾

(17:107) *Say: Believe in it or believe not; surely those who are given*

1 The first aspect pertains to the separation of the Qur'an's content based on subject and discussions, just as a book is separated into different chapters and sections. The second aspect pertains to the gradual revelation of the Qur'an over time. (Trans.)

the knowledge before it fall down on their faces, making obeisance when it is recited to them.

"Those who are given the knowledge before it" include anyone who had knowledge of God and His communications before the revelation of the Qur'an, whether they were Jews, Christians or others. Therefore there is no reason to limit the meaning to only one group, unless one says that the context of the verse implies that these people were subscribers to the truth, meaning a non-abrogated religion, which at the time was Christianity. Based on this aspect, it could be said that the verse is about Christian scholars who were followers of the truth without any deviation or distortion.

Either way, what is meant by them "having been given knowledge before it" is that they have been prepared for understanding and accepting the word of truth because they have been equipped by knowledge in the true sense of it, and because of the humility that their knowledge has brought about for them. That is why when the Qur'an is recited to them it adds to their humility.

…fall down* (yakhirrūna, from khurūr) *on their faces* (lil-adhqān), *making obeisance…: *Adhqān* is the plural of *dhiqn*, meaning chin. *Khurūr* on the chins means falling down on the ground in prostration, as it has been clarified by the addition of "making obeisance." The verse has mentioned chins because the chin is the closest part to the ground when one falls in prostration. It has also been said that what is meant by "chin" here is the entire face, as sometimes a whole is referred to by the name of a part of it by metonymy.

وَ يَقُولُونَ سُبْحانَ رَبِّنا إِنْ كانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّنا لَمَفْعُولاً ﴿١٠٨﴾

(17:108) ***And they say: Glory be to our Lord! most surely the promise of our Lord was to be fulfilled.***

They glorify God of every imperfection, especially of breaking His promise. Based on the context of the previous verses, God's "promise" here specifically concerns the resurrection, and what is said here is the opposite of the polytheists' insistence in denying the resurrection and rejecting the hereafter, as it was repeatedly discussed in the previous verses.

وَ يَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقانِ يَبْكُونَ وَ يَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعاً ﴿١٠٩﴾

(17:109) ***And they fall down on their faces weeping, and it adds to their humility*** **(khushūʿan).**

Repeating "they fall down on their faces" and adding "weeping" show their *khuḍūʿ*, which is outward humility and submissiveness by the body. Likewise, the second sentence [that is, "and it adds to their humility"] shows their *khushūʿ*, which is inward humility and submissiveness of the heart. Overall, the verse is saying that they are humble both outwardly and inwardly.

This verse affirms one of the qualities of the believers for them which was mentioned before: *And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers* (17:82), and it negates one of the qualities of the polytheists about them which is the denial of resurrection.

These three verses [17:107-109] serve to say that the Qur'an is needless of their [the polytheists'] belief. Not because the Qur'an has any need for someone to believe in it and that need is fulfilled by the belief of *"those who are given the knowledge before it,"* but rather their belief is evidence that the Qur'an is a true book that has been revealed by the truth. The Qur'an's reality and perfection do not hinge upon the belief of any believer or the confirmation of any attestant. Thus, if they believe in it, it is to their own advantage; and if they reject it, it is to their own disadvantage—not the Qur'an's.

In the previous verses He talked about their aversion to the Qur'an, their rejection of it, their negligence of it as a sign, and their request for other signs. Then He discussed its qualities of perfection, what makes it a miracle in terms of language and content, its immense impact on the souls, and how it has been sent down. These have made it more than clear that this is a true book that is not overcome by any falsehood or corruption whatsoever. Then in these verses He clarifies that this Book is needless of their faith; hence it is up to them to choose whether they want to believe or disbelieve.

قُلِ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوِ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمٰنَ أَيًّا ما تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْماءُ الْحُسْنىٰ وَ لا تَجْهَرْ بِصَلاتِكَ وَ لا تُخافِتْ بِها وَ ابْتَغِ بَيْنَ ذٰلِكَ سَبِيلاً ﴿١١٠﴾

(17:110) ***Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent*** **(al-Raḥmān)*****; whichever you call upon, He has the best names; and do not utter your prayer with a very raised voice nor be silent***

with regard to it, and seek a way between these.

"Or" indicates the equality or the permissibility of the two sides. *Allah* and *al-Raḥmān* here are two names (sing. ism) that signify a meaning or "that which is named (*musammā*) but they are not [the reality and essence of] the *musammā* itself. The implied meaning is: Call by the name *Allah* or by the name *al-Raḥmān*, either way you are calling Him.

…whichever* (ayyan mā) *you call upon* (tadʿū)*…: This is a conditional clause (*sharṭ*) where particle *mā* is for emphasis,[1] as in: *Thus it is due to* (fa-bimā) *mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently* (3:159), and: *In a little while* (ʿammā qalīlin) *they will most certainly be repenting* (23:40). *Ayyan* is a conditional conjunction and it is the object of *tadʿū* ("you call upon").[2]

…He has the best names…: This is the complement of the above conditional clause. It states the cause but intends its effect.[3] The implied meaning is: Whichever of the two names that you call upon is a best name for Him because all best names belong to Him. Some of the names that signify named realities are good names that signify a good quality in their object of reference, and some of them are evil names that signify an evil quality. However, there is no evil in God. As with good names, they are sometimes "best" (*aḥsan, ḥusnā*) and sometimes "good" (*ḥasan*). The best names signifies good qualities that have no mix of deficiency or evil in them, such as richness without any need, life without any death, dominance without any defeat. The good names signify qualities that are dominantly good but not purely good. God has the best names, meaning any name that signifies the best, highest and purest level of its meaning. This is what is meant when the Imams say, "Indeed God is Rich but not like rich people, Living but not like the living beings, Mighty but not like mighty individuals, Omniscient but not like the scholars, and so on." In

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1 The particle *mā* is not translated as a separate particle in the English text of any of these verses. Reference to the original Arabic text or transliteration may be required to appreciate these points better. (Trans.)

2 In other words, what is being said in this small segment of the verse is: "If you call upon whichever…" This clause is complemented by the next part of the verse. (Trans.)

3 The cause is "He has the best names" and the effect is "If you call any of His names, you have called a best name." The latter is what is intended but the former is what is stated. (Trans.)

other words, He possesses the pure and sheer reality of every perfection without any mix of its opposite.

The pronoun "He" in *"He has the best names"* (17:110) refers to God's Essence which is above every name and description. It does not refer to either of the two names *Allah* and *al-Raḥmān*, because as we said above, what is meant by these two here is a name that signifies a superior meaning, not the superior meaning and essence that is signified by them. Therefore, the verse is not saying: "Whichever of the two names that you call, then that name has all of the best names; that is, the rest of the best names fall under it." Instead, it is saying: "Whichever of His names that you call, it is permissible, because they are all His names. These are all the best names, and to Him belong all best names. These names are the way to call Him; calling upon these names is calling upon Him, because these are His names, and a name is a title and mirror that points to the intended meaning." Contemplate this.

This is one of the cardinal verses of the Qur'an that elucidates how the Qur'an views of the unity of God's Essence and monotheism in worship differs from what is found in idolatry, which is the unity of God's Essence and polytheism in worship.

Idolatry—as we presented a discussion of it in vol. 10 [vol. 20 of the Eng. translation]—views God as an essence that is transcendental to every definition and quality, but is then determined into one name after another, a process that is called generation (*tawallud*). It views the angels and the jinn as outstanding representatives of His names. They are His "children" that influence the universe. Also, those who want to worship God and turn their attention to Him cannot go beyond the level of His names which are represented by His children. This is because what we worship is either the Worshipped One (*al-Il āh*), the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), the sustainer (*al-Rāziq*), the Life-Giver (*al-Muḥyī*), the Death-Giver (*al-Mumīt*), and so on. All of these are names, and these names are manifested in God's children which are the angels and the jinn. As with His Transcendent Essence, it is far higher than the reach of any sense, imagination or intellect, and above being the object of anyone's attention, aspiration, worship or offering.

Given the above, when the idolaters wanted to call upon any name [to appeal to its role in the universe and seek its blessings], they would worship that particular name, which would be the worship of the corresponding angel or jinn which reflects that name. That angel or jinn is

the worshipped god through that act of worship. That is why they have multiple gods, for they have different calls for different needs. It is based on this mentality that when some of the polytheists heard the Prophet supplicate to God in his prayer by saying , *"O Allah, O Raḥmān"* they said, "Look at this Sabean! He forbids us from worshipping two gods but he is calling two gods himself."

This noble verse rejects this view and identifies their mistake by saying that these names are the best names that all belong to Him. They are all possessed by Him alone without any independence or separation from Him, neither in their essence nor in any of their properties and attributes. These names are nothing but means [to His Essence]; calling them is calling Him; and turning one's attention to them is turning one's attention to Him. After all, how can a name block the intended meanings when the very role of a name is to show and signify the meaning and reflects it to the others? Therefore, calling multiple names does not contradict monotheism in worship. Likewise, it is impossible for worship to end with a name without going beyond it.

This shows the error in counting God's names or their representative angels and jinn as His children. The problem is that calling something a son or child—whether that is a literal ascription or an honorific one—hinges on some similarity and commonality between the child and the parent, or the son and the father—either in their very reality and essence or in one of their qualities and perfections. However, God's precinct is clear from the association of anything else in His Essence or in any of His perfections, because not only does He possess what belongs to Him, but He is also the real owner of anything that belongs to other than Him.

The same problem applies to their ascription of various influences and manipulations in the universe to these angels and the names that they represent. The problem is that these angels and names do not possess anything for themselves. They are not independent of Him in anything. *Nay! they are honored servants. They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act* (21:26-27). The same is true about the jinn and what they do. Overall, God is the One Who has given power to all means and causes that work in the universe. He is the possessor of what He has bestowed on them and He has power over what He has given them power over it.

This is inferred from the next verse: *And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom,*

and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace (17:111). We shall discuss it again below by God's will.

This verse also shows that the name Allāh—which is one of the best names—was originally *al-ilāh*, which is an attribute (*waṣf, ṣifah*) that signifies the meaning of being worshipped. However, it has then become a proper noun due to its repeated usage as a name, such that now it is qualified by attributes [as a noun]. For instance we say, *"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful"* but we do not say, "In the name of *al-Raḥmān*, *Allah*, the Merciful" (*bism al-Raḥmān Allāh al-Raḥīm*).

…and do not utter your prayer with a very raised voice **(lā tajhar, from jahr)** ***nor be silent*** **(lā tukhāfit, from ikhfāt)** ***with regard to it, and seek a way between these:*** *Jahr* (loud) and *ikhfāt* (soft) are two correlative qualities for voice. One can also assume a third quality in between them that would count as *ikhfāt* relative to *jahr*, and jahr relative to *ikhfāt*. Then *jahr* would be a very high-pitched voice, *ikhfāt* would be a very low-pitched one, and in between there will be a moderate pitch. The implied meaning is: When you pray, neither raise your voice too high nor keep it too low, but follow a balanced middle course between the two . The verse refers to this as a "way" (*sabīl*) because it is a custom that is followed by the Prophet and the believers in his nation who follow him.

The above is based on "your prayer" meaning all prayers; that is, each and every prayer. However, it could be that it means all prayers overall, and this meaning is perhaps more apparent. Then the meaning would be: Do not raise your voice in all of your prayers, nor keep it low in all of them, but follow a middle course, meaning raise your voice in some and keep it low in others. This is more compliant with what is recorded in the Prophet's tradition: raising the voice in some of the obligatory daily prayers such as the Morning, the Sunset and the Evening Prayers, and keeping it low in the rest.

This second interpretation is arguably a better way of linking the two first and second halves of the verse. Praying with a high pitch suggest God's attribute of being Supreme and Exalted, while praying with a low pitch suggests His attribute of being Close, Closer than the jugular vein. Therefore combining both attributes in the prayers is a way of doing justice to all of His names.

وَ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِی لَمْ یَتَّخِذْ وَلَداً وَ لَمْ یَکُنْ لَهُ شَرِیكٌ فِی الْمُلْكِ وَ

لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِنَ الذُّلِّ وَ كَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيراً ﴿١١١﴾

(17:111) ***And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace; and proclaim His greatness magnifying (Him).***

This adds to what was said in the previous verse: *Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent* (17:110). The verse is essentially saying: Tell them that the names that they call upon and suppose to be gods besides Him are only His names and belong to Him. They do not themselves, let alone anything else. Thus, calling these names is calling Him; He is the only Worshipped Being in all circumstances.

Then praise and extol Him for the implications of His absolute sovereignty. There is nothing like Him in terms of essence or attribute, which entails that nothing can be held as His son that has spawned from His essence or attribute, contrary to the belief of the polytheists and the People of the Book—including the Christians, the Jews and the Magians—about the angels, the jinn, Christ, Ezra (ʿUzayr) or their scholars. Neither does He have any partner that has not emerged from Him but has a share in His kingdom, as it was held by the polytheists, the dualists and others such as devil-worshippers. Nor does He have a guardian that takes part in His kingdom and has superiority over Him such that he would fix what He is unable to fix in His kingdom.

In other words, there is nothing like Him, whether that is a child that would be under Him, a partner that would be equal to Him, or a guardian that would be above Him in His kingdom.

The verse effectively praises God for His absolute sovereignty, a result of which is the negation of sons, partners and guardians. It is for this reason that He has ordered the Prophet to do praise (*taḥmīd*) instead of glorification (*tasbīḥ*) even though the verse talks about the lack of sons, partners and guardians, which is a negative attribute[1] and befits glorification more so than praise.[2] Contemplate this.

1 Negative attributes or qualities (*al-ṣifāt al-salbiyyah*) are attributes that should be negated about God as they involve some imperfection. (Trans.)

2 Praise pertains to positive attributes, whereby God is praised for perfection. Glorification pertains to negative attributes, whereby God is declared to be

God then finishes the verse by saying: *and proclaim His greatness magnifying (Him)* (17:111). This unconditional command is made after describing His positive and negative attributes [by the praise and glorification in the previous part of the verse], which implies that God should be held greater than every description. That is why "God is greater" (*Allāhu akbar*) has been interpreted as "He is greater than being described,"[1] as narrated from al-Ṣādiq. If it meant that "He is greater than everything" then that would have involved some element of associating others with Him in greatness. However, His precinct is far superior than anything associating with Him in any matter.

An elegant point in this chapter is that its first verse starts with glorification and its last verse starts with praise and ends with magnification.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated that ʿAlī recited verse 17:102 as: "Truly I know…"[2] and said: By God the enemy of God [that is, Pharaoh] did not know, but Moses was the one who knew.[3]

Author's comment: The above is narrated as ʿAlī's recitation.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about one who cannot prostrate by his forehead because of some illness. He said: He should place his chin on the earth. Indeed God says: *They fall down on their faces, making obeisance* (17:107).[4]

Author's comment: There are also other narrations to this effect.

(3) Ibn ʿAbbās said: One day the Messenger of God prayed in Mecca and supplicated to God where he said, *"O Allāh, O Raḥmān."* Then the polytheists said, "Look at this Sabean [that is, pagan]!

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clear from imperfection. (Trans.)

1 In other words, God is greater than any description about Him. (Ed.)

2 This is against the common recitation of *"Truly you know."* The verse is Moses' reply to Pharaoh about the signs that he had brought. The common recitation is: *He said: Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these as clear proof…* (Trans.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Muḥammad, via his chain of narration.

He forbids us from worshipping two gods[1] but he is calling two gods himself." *That is when God revealed: Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent God…* (17:110).[2]

Author's comment: There are also other narrations that state other causes and contexts for the revelation of this verse, however this narration matches the content of the verse the best.

(4) Hishām b. al-Ḥakam said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the names of God and their roots of derivation. I asked him, "What is Allāh derived from?" He said, "O Hishām, *Allāh* is derived from *Ilāh*, and [the name] *Ilāh* necessitates a worshipped being [in the external world], for the *ism* (name) is different from the *musammā* (the meaning and reality that the name signifies). If one worships only the name but not the meaning, then he has disbelieved and has not worshipped anything. If one worships both the name and the meaning, then he has disbelieved and has worshipped two gods. If one worships only the meaning but not the name, then that is monotheism. Did you get that O Hishām?" I said, "Tell me more!" He continued, "Indeed God has 99 names. If the name was the same as the meaning then each of these names would have been a god. However, Allah [that is, the reality and essence of God] is the meaning that is signified by all of these names, and they are all other than Him. O Hishām, 'bread' is [only] the name of that which is eaten [not the actual food]; 'water' is [only] the name of that which is drunk [not the actual drink]; 'clothes' is [only] the name of that which is worn [not the actual dress]; and 'fire' is [only]the name of that which burns [not the actual flames]…"[3]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: If one worships God according to his imagination (*tawahhum*), then he has disbelieved. If one worships the name but not the meaning, then he has disbelieved. If one worships both the name and the meaning then he has associated partners [with God]. But the companions [that is, followers] of the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī] are those who

1 This is apparently regarding the following verse: *And Allah has said: Take not two gods, He is only one God; so of Me alone should you be afraid* (16:51). (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr,* on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Tawḥīd,* via a connected chain of narration, and *al-Iḥtijāj* says via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*).

worship the meaning by matching the names to it based on the attributes by which He has described Himself. They believe in it [the meaning] in their heart and speak of it by their tongue [by means of invoking His names] in private and public.[1]

Author's comment: In another narration they are described as "They are the true believers" [instead of "they are the companions of the Commander of the Faithful"].

(6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: God has indeed created a name that is not characterized by letters, that is not uttered by words, that is not embodied in a person, that is not described by any analogy, and that is not colored by any color. Sides and locations do not apply to it; definitions are far from it; and the sense of all thinkers are veiled from it. It is covered without having a covering. Then He made it a complete word based on four concomitant parts that none precedes the others. He manifested three of them due to His creatures' need to them, and veiled one of them which is the name that is concealed and reserved by the those three names that have appeared.

The manifest names are Allāh, Tabāraka and Subḥāna, each of which has four pillars, making twelve pillars [in total]. Then He created thirty names and actions that are related to each pillar: He is al-Raḥmān (the Beneficent), al-Raḥīm (the Merciful), al-Malik (the King), al-Quddūs (the Sacrosanct), al-Khāliq (the Creator), al-Bāriʾ (the Maker), al-Muṣawwir (the Fashioner), al-Ḥayy (the Living), al-Qayyūm (the Upright), *Lā taʾkhudhuhu sinatun wa lā nawm* (neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him), al-ʿAlīm (the Knower), al-Khabīr (the Aware), al-Samīʿ (the Hearer), al-Baṣīr (the Seer), al-Ḥakīm (the Wise), al-ʿAzīz (the Mighty), al-Jabbār (the Overpowering), al-Mutakabbir (the Grandiose), al-ʿAlī (the Exalted), al-ʿAẓīm (the Magnificent), al-Muqtadir (the Omnipotent), al-Qādir (the Powerful), al-Salām (the Peaceable), al-Muʾmin (the Securer), al-Muhaymin (the Predominant), al-Bāriʾ (the Maker), al-Munshiʾ (the Configurer), al-Badīʿ (the Originator), al-Rafīʿ (the Lofty), al-Jalīl (the Majestic), al-Karīm (the Noble), al-Rāziq (the Sustainer), al-Muḥyī (the Life-Giver),

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Riʾāb, through more than one individual narrating from the Imam.

al-Mumīt (the Death-Giver), al-Bāʿith (the Resurrector) and al-Wārith (the Inheritor).[1]

These names and the rest of the best names up to 360 names are related to those three names. The three names are the pillars and a veil for the one name that is concealed and reserved by them. This is [the meaning of] His words: Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent God; whichever you call upon, He has the best names (17:110).[2]

Author's comment: This narration is also reported in *al-Kāfī* from the Imam.

It was also mentioned before in our discussion on the best names in vol. 8 [vol. 16 of the Eng. translation] that these terms that we call "God's names" are really the names of His names. His real name is an external instance and reality that indicates and points to Him, which would be His Essence in the sense of having a certain attribute. Based on this, some of His best names are identical with His Essence, and those are the names that comprise a positive attribute of perfection like the Living, the Knower and the Powerful. Some other names are extra to the Essence and outside it, and those are the names that comprise a negative attribute or an attribute of action such as the Creator, the Sustainer, and "no nap or sleep overtakes Him." That is the case of His real names. As with the names of His names—that is, the terms that indicate His Essence in the sense of having a certain attribute—then there is no doubt that they are other than His Essence and they are originated terms that depend on one who utters them.

The only difference of opinion is over two issues:

i) Some early ignorant theologians mixed God's real names with the names of His names. They supposed that the identicalness of His names with His Essence means the identicalness of the names of His names with His Essence. Then they said that the name is identical with the musammā (the meaning and reality that the name signifies), and

1 These are 36 names out of the total of 360. Note that the name *al-Bāriʿ* (the Maker) is mentioned twice, which is perhaps a mistake on the part of the scribes. The second one might have been *al-Bādiʾ* (the Beginner). (Trans.)

2 *Biḥār al-anwār*, book of *tawḥīd*, chapter on "The Difference between the Name and the Meaning," narrating from *al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar.

therefore worshipping and calling upon the name is the same as worshipping the musammā. This view was prevalent early on during the rule of the Abbasids. The two narrations above from *al-Tawḥīd* refute this view.

ii) The polytheists believed that God cannot be an object of attention in worship, but one can only turn his attention in worship to His names. Hence, His names—or their manifestations in the form of angels, jinn and perfect human beings—are what should be worshipped and called upon, not God Himself. Our exposition above showed that verse 17:110 (*Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent God…*) serves to refute this view.

The last narration above shows how His names have come to be from His Essence that is higher and superior to being encompassed by any form of knowledge, delimited by any quality or description, and defined by any name or definition. Both the beginning of the hadith and its subsequent elaboration explicitly show that what is meant by names in this narration is His real names, not the names of His names. We provided an exposition of this hadith in our discussion of the best names in vol. 8 [vol. 16 of the Eng. translation]. Consult it if you wish.

(7) Concerning verse 17:110 (*and do not utter your prayer with a very raised voice nor be silent with regard to it, and seek a way between these*) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: In Mecca the Messenger of God used to raise his voice [when he prayed], which made the polytheists know where he is and thus come and bother him. That is when this verse was revealed.[1]

Author's comment: The same idea is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās. It is also narrated from ʿĀʾishah that the verse was revealed about supplication (*duʿāʾ*). There is no problem with this as these narrations do not oppose one another.[2] It is also narrated from her that it was revealed about *tashahhud* [in prayer].

(8) Samāʿah said: I asked him [Imam al-Ṣādiq] about the verse: *And*

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Zurārah, Ḥumran and Muḥammad b. Muslim.

2 The reason why these narrations do not oppose one another is that they can all be particular instances of a general meaning. In other words, these narrations do not limit the verse to their proposed meaning, but each of them offers one meaning and application for the verse, and this does not contradict with there being other meanings and applications for it as well. (Trans.)

do not utter your prayer with a very raised voice nor be silent with regard to it (17:110). He said: "Being silent with regard to it" is a pitch that you cannot hear yourself. "Raised voice" is that which is very loud.[1]

Author's comment: This confirms the first interpretation that we presented in the exposition of the verse.

(9) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Sinān said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "Is it incumbent on the leader of [congregational] prayer that those praying behind him should hear his voice even if they are many [and far]?" He replied, "He should have a balanced pitch in recitation. God says: *And do not utter your prayer with a very raised voice nor be silent with regard to it* (17:110)."[2]

(10) The Messenger of God said: The Verse of Might (*āyat al-ʿizzah*) is: *And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace; and proclaim His greatness magnifying (Him)* (17:111).[3]

(11) Concerning verse 17:111 (*and Who has not a guardian to save Him from disgrace*) it is narrated from one of the Infallibles: He has not been subdued so that He may need a guardian to assist Him.[4]

Qur'anic and Narrative Discussion: The Gradual Revelation of Qur'an in Chapters

This discussion pertains to the verse: *And it is a Qur'an which We have revealed in portions* (faraqnāhu) *so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees* (17:106). It consists of three parts:

1. The Divisions of Qur'an

The Qur'an is known by certain divisions and parts such as *juzʾ*, *ḥizb* and *ʿashr*,[5] but there are two divisions that are found in the Glorious Book

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī, on the authority of Muʿādh b. Anas.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

5 The Qur'an is divided into 30 *ajzāʾ* (plural of *juzʾ*). Each *juzʾ* is divided into two

itself: *sūrah* (chapter) and *āyah* (verse). God has mentioned these two terms in several places in His Book such as: (This is) a chapter which We have revealed (24:1), Say: Then bring a chapter like this (10:38), and so on.

The term *sūrah* has been used repeatedly by the Prophet, his Companions and the Imams, to the point that it leaves no doubt that there is a Qur'anic reality behind this term, which is a collection of God's words that start with *bismilah* (that is, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful") and have a common thread and purpose. This is how a *sūrah* is known and this applies to all *suwar* except Chapter 9 (al-Barāʾah), which, according to some narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, is a continuation of Chapter 8 (al-Anfāl).[1] The other exceptions are Chapters 93 (al-Ḍuḥā) an 94 (al-Sharḥ) which the Imams have identified as one *sūrah*, and also Chapters 105 (al-Fīl) and 106 (Quraysh) that have been tied together.[2]

Similarly, the term *āyah* has appeared several times in God's Book, referring to a piece of speech. For example: And when His communications are recited to them they increase them in faith (8:2), and: A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an (41:3).

It has been narrated on the authority of Umm Salamah that the Prophet used to pause at the beginning of each verse. It has been authenticated that Chapter 1 (al-Ḥamd) consists of seven verses. It is also narrated from him that Chapter 67 (al-Mulk) has 30 verses. There are also other narrations that show the use of the term āyah in the words of the Prophet and his family.

If we reflect on the natural division of Arabic speech into parts and pieces—especially in the case of rhythmic speech—and contemplate what has been narrated from the Prophet and his family about the number of verses, then it can be deduced that an *āyah* (verse) of the Qur'an is that

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aḥzāb (plural of *ḥizb*). *ʿAshr* is a group of ten verses. Madanī Shīrāzī, *al-Ṭarāz al-awwal*, under *ʿ-sh-r*. Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, under *ʿ-sh-r*. (Trans.)

1 We presented some of these narrations under verse 15:9 (Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian) in vol. 12 [vol. 23 of the Eng. translation]. (Auth.)

2 This is narrated by Shaykh Ṭūsī in *Tahdhīb*, via his chain of narration, on the authority of al-Shaḥḥām, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. It has been reported as "a narration by our fellow companions [that is, Shias]" by al-Muḥaqqiq [al-Ḥillī] in *Sharāʾiʿ al-Islām* and by al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

which should be recited as one piece, separated from what is before and after it.

This varies based on context, especially rhythmic contexts. Sometimes a verse is a single word [that rhymes with the verses before and after it] such as *mudhāmmatān* (55:64, meaning: Both inclining to blackness). Sometimes a verse is two words or more. Sometimes a verse is not a complete sentence [but it is a verse because of the rhythm] such as: The Beneficent God, Taught the Qur'an. He created man, Taught him the mode of expression (55:1-4), and: The sure calamity! What is the sure calamity! And what would make you realize what the sure calamity is! (69:1-3). Sometimes a verse is very long such as the Verse of Loan (*āyat al-dayn*), 2:282.

2. The Number of Chapters

There are 114 chapters (*suwar*, plural of *sūrah*) in the Qur'an, as recorded in the edition that is commonly found among Muslims, and that is the ʿUthmānī edition. It was already said that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt did not count Chapter 9 as a separate chapter, and they counted Chapters 93 and 94 to be one, and Chapters 105 and 106 to be one.

As with the number of verses, there is no mutawātir (repeatedly reported, mass-transmitted) narration that defines the beginning and end of every single verse in the Qur'an. There are also no singular narrations that can be relied upon in this regard. A clear sign of this lack of evidence is the difference of Qur'anic verses according to different groups like the Meccans, the Medinites, the Syrians, the Basrans and the Kufans.

The following numbers have been claimed about the number of Qur'anic verses: 6000, 6204, 6214, 6219, 6225, 6236.

The Meccans have narrated their number on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Kathīr, on the authority of Mujāhid, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, on the authority of Ubayy b. Kaʿb. The Medinites have narrated two numbers: one goes back to Abū Jaʿfar Yazīd b. al-Qaʿqāʿ and Shaybah b. Niṣāḥ, and the other goes back to Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Kathīr al-Anṣārī. The Syrians have narrated their number on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ. The number of the people of Basra goes back to ʿĀṣim b. al-ʿAjjāj al-Jaḥdarī. The number of the people of Kūfah has been attributed to Ḥamzah, al-Kisāʾī and Khalaf. Ḥamzah said, "We have been told this number by Ibn Abī Laylā, on the authority of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib."

At any rate, we are not required to take any of these views as none of them is backed by either a mass-transmitted narration or a singular one that is authentic and reliable, by which we can clearly distinguish one verse from another. If there is any view that is clear and evident, then it is to be adopted; otherwise, a thinker and researcher should choose what seems more plausible to him.

There is a problem with the number of verses that the Kufans have narrated from ʿAlī, because it does not include *bismilah* (*"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful"*) as a verse in any chapter except for Chapter 1 (Fātiḥat al-Kitāb), while other narrations from him and the rest of the Imams say that *bismilah* is a verse of the Qur'an and it is a part of every chapter that starts with it. This means that as much as the number of *bismilahs* should be added to the number of verses [excluding Chapter 1's *bismilah*].

This is why we did not go into any detail about the different views about the number of verses here. There is also a list of chapters where there is consensus about their number of verses, and those are 40 chapters. As for the other 74, there is disagreement about their number of verses or where the verses begin . There are some disjointed letters—like *alif-lām-rāʾ*—that are unanimously held as not being a separate verse, some that are held as a separate verse, and others that have been debated. Anyone interested to know more details about this should refer to the appropriate references.[1]

3. The Order of Chapters

Concerning the order of revelation of the chapters, it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās: "Whenever the beginning of a chapter was revealed in Mecca it was written down there, and then God added to it as He willed. The first chapter of the Qur'an that was revealed was Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bismi rabbika*) , then 68 (nūn), then 73 (*yā ayyuhā al-muzzammil*), then 74 (*yā ayyuhā al-muddaththir*), then 111 (*tabbat yadā Abī Lahab*), then 81 (*idhā al-shamsu kuwwirat*), then 87 (*sabbiḥ isma rabbika al-aʿlā*), then 92 (*wal-layli idhā yakhshā*), then 89 (*wal-fajr*), then 93 (*wal-ḍuḥā*), then 94 (*alam nashraḥ*), then 103 (*wal-ʿaṣr*), then 100 (*wal-ʿādiyāt*), then 108 (*innā aʿṭaynāka*), then 102 (*alhākum al-takāthur*), then 107 (*araʾayta aldhī yukadhdhibu*), then

1 One good references for these discussions is Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'an*. (Trans.)

109 (*yā ayyuhā al-kāfirūn*), then 105 (*alam tara kayfa faʿala rabbuka*), then 113 (*qul aʿūdhu bi rabb al-falaq*), then 114 (*qul aʿūdhu bi rabb al-nās*), then 112 (*qul huwa Allāhu aḥad*), then 53 (al-Najm), then 80 (ʿabasa), then 97 (*innā anzalnāhu fī laylati al-qadr*), then 91 (*wal-shamsi wa ḍuḥāhā*), then 85 (*wal-samāʾi dhāti al-burūj*), then 95 (al-Tīn), then 106 (*li-īlāfi Quraysh*), then 101 (al-Qāriʿah), then 75 (*lā uqsimu bi-yawmi al-qiyāmah*), then 104 (*waylun li-kulli humazah*), then 77 (*wal-mursalāt*), then 50 (Qāf), then 90 (*lā uqsimu bi-hādhā al-balad*), then 86 (*wal-samāʾi wal-ṭāriq*), then 54 (*iqtrabat al-sāʿah*), then 38 (Ṣād), then 7 (al-Aʿrāf), then 72 (*qul ūḥiya ilayya*), then 36 (Yā-Sīn), then 25 (al-Furqān), then 35 (al-Malāʾikah), then 19 (*kāf-hā-yā-ʿayn-ṣād*), then 20 (Ṭā-Hā), then 56 (al-Wāqiʿah), then 26 (*ṭā-sīn-mīm al-Shuʿarāʾ*), then 27 (ṭā-sīn), then 28 (al-Qaṣaṣ), then 17 (Banī Isrāʾīl), then 10 (Yūnus), then 11 (Hūd), then 12 (Yūsuf), then 15 (al-Ḥijr), then 6 (al-Anʿām), then 37 (al-Ṣāffāt), then 31 (Luqmān), then 34 (Sabaʾ), then 39 (al-Zumar), then 40 (*ḥā-mīm al-muʾmin*), then 41 (*ḥā-mīm al-sajdah*), then 42 (*ḥā-mīm ʿayn-sīn-qāf*), then 43 (*ḥā-mīm al-zukhruf*), then 44 (*ḥā-mīm al-dukhān*), then 45 (*ḥā-mīm al-jāthiyah*), then 46 (*ḥā-mīm al-aḥqāf*), then 51 (al-Dhāriyāt), then 88 (al-Ghāshiyah), then 18 (al-Kahf), then 16 (al-Naḥl), then 71 (*innā arsalnā Nūhan*), then 14 (Ibrāhīm), then 21 (al-Anbiyāʾ), then 23 (al-Muʾminūn), then 32 (*tanzīl al-Sajdah*), then 52 (al-Ṭūr), then 67 (*tabāraka al-Mulk*), then 69 (al-Ḥāqqah), then 70 (*saʾala*), then 78 (*ʿamma yatasāʾalūna*), then 79 (al-Nāziʿāt), then 82 (*idhā al-samāʾu infaṭarat*), then 84 (*idhā al-samāʾu inshaqqat*), then 30 (al-Rūm), then 29 (al-ʿAnkabūt), then 83 (*waylun lil-muṭaffifīn*). These are what was revealed in Mecca.

Then the following chapters were revealed in Medina: 2 (al-Baqarah), then 8 (al-Anfāl), then 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān), then 33 (al-Aḥzāb), then 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah), then 4 (al-Nisāʾ), then 99 (*idhā zulzilat*), then 57 (al-Ḥadīd), then 47 (al-Qitāl), then 13 (al-Raʿd), then 55 (al-Raḥmān), then 76 (al-Insān), then 65 (al-Ṭalāq), then 98 (*lam yakun*), then 59 (al-Ḥashr), then 110 (*idhā jaʾa naṣr Allāh*), then 24 (al-Nūr), then 22 (al-Ḥajj), then 63 (al-Munāfiqūn), then 58 (al-Mujādilah), then 49 (al-Ḥujurāt), then 66 (al-Taḥrīm), then 62 (al-Jumʿah), then 64 (al-Taghābun), then 61 (al-Ṣaff), then 48 (al-Fatḥ), then 5 (al-Māʾidah), then 9 (*barāʾa h*)."[1]

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1 *Al-Itqān*, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḍarīs in *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾan*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Jaʿfar al-Rāzī, on the authority of ʿAmr b. Hārūn, on the authority of ʿUthmān b. ʿAṭāʾ al-Khurāsānī, on the authority

The above narration is missing Chapter 1 (Fātiḥat al-Kitāb). It has been said that it was revealed twice: once in Mecca and once in Medina.

It is also narrated from ʿIkramah and al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-Ḥasan: "In Mecca God revealed Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bismi rabbika*)…" Then the narration continues like the last one from Ibn ʿAbbās, except that it does not mention Chapters 1 (al-Fātiḥah), 7 (al-Aʿrāf) and 19 (*kāf-hā-yā-ʿayn-ṣād*) which were revealed in Mecca. Among the chapters revealed in Medina, the narration mentions Chapter 44 (*ḥā-mīm al-dukhān*) before 41 (*ḥā-mīm al-sajdah*); Chapter 84 (*idhā al-samāʾu inshaqqat*) before 82 (*idhā al-samāʾu infaṭarat*); Chapter 83 (al-Muṭaffifīn) before 2 (al-Baqarah); Chapter 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān) before 8 (al-Anfāl); Chapter 5 (al-Māʾidah) before 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah)."[1]

Al-Itqān then reports another narration from Ibn ʿAbbās: "The first thing in the Qur'an that God revealed to His Prophet was *iqraʾ bismi rabbika* [Chapter 96]…" The order given here is the same as ʿIkramah's narration, but this one also includes the Meccan chapters that were missing in ʿIkramah's narration.

It is also narrated: "Twenty chapters are agreed upon to be Medinite; there is disagreement over 12; and the rest are Meccan by consensus."

What is agreed upon to be Medinite are Chapters 2 (al-Baqarah), 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān), 4 (al-Nisāʾ), 5 (al-Māʾidah), 8 (al-Anfāl), 9 (al-Tawbah), 24 (al-Nūr), 33 (al-Aḥzāb), 47 (Muḥammad), 48 (al-Fatḥ), 49 (al-Ḥujurāt), 57 (al-Ḥadīd), 58 (al-Mujādilah), 59 (al-Ḥashr), 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah), 62 (al-Jumʿah), 63 (al-Munāfiqūn), 65 (al-Ṭalāq), 66 (al-Taḥrīm) and 110 (al-Naṣr).

The ones that are disagreed upon about where they were are Chapters 13 (al-Raʿd), 55 (al-Raḥmān), 61 (al-Ṣaff), 64 (al-Taghābun), 72 (al-Jinn), 83 (al-Muṭaffifīn), 97 (al-Qadr), 98 (al-Bayyinah), 99 (al-Zilzāl), 112 (al-Tawḥīd), and *al-muʿawwidhatayn* (113 and 114).

Knowing which chapters were revealed in Mecca and which in Medina has a central impact in analyzing the noble life of the Prophet, the Prophetic mission, and how it evolved during his time spiritually, politically and socially.

The narrations—as you saw above—are no reliable evidence to prove

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of his father.

1 *Al-Itqān*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī's *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*, via its chain of narration.

anything in this regard because the difference between them renders them void of authority.

Hence, the way to achieve this objective [that is, identifying whether a chapter is Meccan or Medinite] is to contemplate the content of the verses and use any internal or external evidence available. This is the approach that we have followed in this book. God is to be sought for help.

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The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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